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LORD'S SUPPER



W. T. DAVISON, M.A., D.D.



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The Lord's Supper

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The Lord's Supper

*AIDS TO ITS INTELLIGENT AND
DEVOUT OBSERVANCE*

BY

W. T. DAVISON, M.A., D.D.



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Preface



THE object of this little book, prepared at the request of the Book-Committee of the Wesleyan Conference, may be stated in few words. It is an attempt to combine the giving of some measure of instruction concerning the history and meaning of the Lord's Supper with devotional guidance towards its reverent observance. Such an attempt may very easily fail. Those who require only a devotional guide may be disposed to resent the didactic tone of some portions, while those who desire information may resent the introduction of devout comments and reflections. It is hoped, however, that it may more or less meet the wants of the following classes of persons: (1) Christians who are in the habit of attending the Lord's Supper regularly, but who need assistance

to guide their minds into profitable trains of thought, both before and after communion.

(2) Christians who for any reason are slack in their observance of the ordinance, that they may be reminded of the sacred obligations they are in danger of forgetting, and the rich privilege they fail to enjoy and use.

(3) Young people, recent converts, and comparatively untrained Christians, who need to be instructed, if they are to join intelligently as well as devoutly in this most sacred part of Christian worship. The book may be useful, therefore, to ministers and leaders of classes, and will often answer its end much better if it be accompanied by oral comment and explanation.

Controversy has been avoided as far as possible. Unfortunately, false and misleading views of the Lord's Supper—put forward in all sincerity by those who hold them—are so common, perhaps increasingly common, that it has been found necessary to state what, if we follow the New Testament, the Lord's Supper is *not*, as well as what it is. It is grievous, but apparently at present

inevitable, that good Christians should differ, often seriously, about the nature of a service which is pre-eminently one of Christian communion. But all that might savour of controversy has in this little manual been kept within the narrowest bounds, and the author would fain hope that he has been able to preserve throughout the spirit of Christian charity. Those who have not yet learned to meet in full accord at the Lord's Table may yet partake His Spirit, learn His lessons, and do His will, till they see eye to eye in His presence.



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The Lord's Supper



I

Its Institution

CHRISTIANITY is a spiritual religion. Its ceremonies are of the fewest and simplest. Its worship consists of praise, prayer, reading and exposition of the Scriptures, and exhortation to a godly life. St. James tells us that the "ritual" of "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."¹ St. James' Master taught that the Father seeketh such, and such only, to worship Him as are prepared to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

¹ Jas. i. 27. The word translated "religion" means properly the ritual or ceremonial part of religious service.

But He who knew what was in man, who understood by His own gracious wearing of our mortal flesh that man is far from being pure spirit, that the most spiritual of men need some external helps for internal growth in grace and knowledge, appointed for His Church in all ages two simple rites, the importance of which, even in a spiritual community, is inestimable — Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The first is the rite of initiation into His service, the second is the rite of fellowship in it. Both are of the simplest kind: the pouring or sprinkling of water to symbolise spiritual cleansing and renewal; the eating of bread and drinking of wine at His command, in His name, at His table. But each of these rites is of deep significance, and the meaning of the latter it is the object of these pages to unfold for devout meditation and practical use.

These observances are called Sacraments, a name derived from a Latin word used to translate the Greek, which in the New Testament is familiar to us under the rendering "mystery." This name is not, however,

given to Baptism and the Lord's Supper by Christ or His apostles, but came into use in the Christian Church in the second century. The Greek word denotes the deep, inner meaning which underlies the external sign or symbol in each case; the Latin word, originally meaning a military oath, indicates that the symbols are pledges of personal loyalty to and union with that great Leader who appointed them. The soldier follows the flag, which is not to him a mere piece of bunting, but a symbol of all that is precious to a loyal lover of his country; and the presence of two sacraments in the Church of Christ furnishes two central symbols to which our Christian loyalty may readily and rightly attach itself, each fraught with deep meaning, each bringing with it a message as from the lips of the Master Himself. A sacrament, says the Catechism, is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given unto us, ordained by Christ Himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof." Sacraments are signs of grace, and

seals of grace; and, when rightly used, will always prove means of grace. They not only indicate spiritual blessing by an easily intelligible outward act, they pledge the Giver of them, as of His own personal assurance, to impart the grace they symbolise, and when the conditions of observance are complied with, they become actual means of grace to those who faithfully observe them. Reverently we draw near now to the Master's feet to ask the question which Jewish children ask their parents at the celebration of the Passover, "What mean ye by this service?"¹ What meanest Thou, gracious Lord, by Thine own word, "This do in remembrance of Me"? What meaning lies wrapped up in these "holy mysteries" for me to learn and ponder, and how may I draw near to Thy table so as to obtain the grace which there Thou waitest in Thine own ordinance to bestow?

We turn to that sacred hour when this service was first instituted,—“the night in which He was betrayed,”—to that solemn

¹ Ex. xii. 26.

scene which so many artists have tried—and none been able—to paint. It is the Passover night, or the night of Preparation for the Passover, only second to it in solemnity. “How different is this night from all other nights!” says the head of the Jewish household in the liturgy used at their annual festival. The Christian repeats the words with unutterably deeper meaning. How different was that night from all other nights! With earnest desire had the Master desired thus to partake for the last time of the festal meal with His disciples before He suffered, to drink with them of the fruit of the vine yet once more before He should drink it new with them in His Father’s kingdom. He is gathered with them round the table, on which are placed the paschal lamb, the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, and all the appointments of the festival. The blessing is uttered, the prayer offered, the first part of the Hallel (Psalms cxiii. and cxiv.) sung, the first cup drunk, the eating of the Passover commenced. So in thought are we led by the simple narrative from

stage to stage of the meal, each part being duly ordered, and the singing of the hymn especially noted by two Evangelists.

Whether our Lord and His disciples observed the whole ritual of the Passover meal or not on this occasion we cannot tell, but more than one incident marked off this celebration from the ordinary Jewish observance. One was that most touching and significant Washing of the Disciples' Feet, narrated by St. John; another was that terrible episode of Judas which gave a dark name to this night, the night of betrayal; but the chief was the gracious and tender Institution of the Christian Festival of Remembrance. An account of it is given us by St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. Paul.¹ The narratives are sufficiently alike to show the fidelity with which the account has been handed down; they differ enough to prove the independence of the writers and to prevent the Church of Christ from depending unduly upon an exact form of words

¹ Matt. xxvi. 26-30; Mark xiv. 22-25; Luke xxii. 17-20;
1 Cor. xi. 21-23.

which might lend itself to superstitious use. Let us place our Lord's words as given by these various accounts together, and reverently seek out their meaning. St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you," showing that great importance was from the first attached to the circumstances and conditions of the institution of the Lord's Supper. And well may every loyal ear be strained to catch every word of the Master as He gives a legacy to His Church in all ages, to be sacredly kept for His sake, till He comes again !

When the four accounts are arranged in order, it is seen that the narratives of St. Matthew and St. Mark present a close similarity to one another on the one hand, and those of St. Luke and St. Paul on the other. All four agree in the simple statement that the Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks or blessed it, giving it to the disciples with the words, *This is My body*; also the cup, giving it to them all to drink with the words (literally or substantially), *This is My blood*.

They differ, however, in that St. Luke adds to the former words, *which is given for you*; St. Paul, *which is for you*; St. Matthew and St. Mark add, *Take ye*, or *Take, eat*. In giving the cup, St. Matthew and St. Mark give the words, *This is My blood of the covenant, which is shed for many*; St. Matthew adding, *unto remission of sins*. Both also add, with slightly varying phraseology, *I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of God (My Father's kingdom)*. St. Luke puts this utterance earlier and in somewhat different connection. St. Luke and St. Paul give the words accompanying the delivery of the cup thus, *This cup is the new covenant in My blood*; St. Luke adding, *even that which is poured out for you*; St. Paul, *This do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me*. The order of words and slight individual touches of expression seem distinctly to show that two very slightly differing lines of tradition have come down to us, the former followed by the first two Evangelists, writing

independently ; the latter by St. Luke and St. Paul, with still more marked signs of independence, yet with sufficient evidence of a common origin.

The first thought which arrests us is suggested by Christ's explicit reference to the Passover and His further reference to a covenant, or a new covenant in His blood. We can seldom interpret the New Testament adequately without some reference to the Old. Here, least of all, can we omit the backward look. The Saviour Himself points backwards before He points His disciples onwards and forwards. The Passover was the Jewish festival of redemption. Everything in connection with its celebration was arranged to recall the memorable birth-night of the nation. In that solemn night when the Angel of Destruction passed over the doorways of Israel, sprinkled with blood, as he went on his stern errand to smite the first-born of the Egyptians ; at that hour when the people, ransomed from the very jaws of death, ate hastily of "the Lord's Passover" ere they set out upon their pilgrimage

journey ; at that moment when the multitude celebrated together the feast which represented to them emancipation from slavery and rescue from imminent destruction, a nation was born. Hitherto there had been a mixed rabble of oppressed serfs, without spirit, unity, or cohesion ; henceforth there was to be a sacred nation, a royal priesthood, a people of God's own possession, consecrated to the service of Him who had redeemed them and made them His own for ever.

Some time after this, after the law had been given at Mount Sinai, a solemn covenant was made, of which the words of the law of the Lord were at the same time the centre and the object.¹ Burnt-offerings and peace-offerings were sacrificed to God, and Moses "took half of the blood and put it in basons, and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant and read in the audience of the people ; and they said, All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on

¹ Ex. xxiv. ; see especially vers. 4-8.

the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." The words here spoken of are, if we may so say, the first words of Holy Scripture, the first known written record of the Divine will. The utterance of the simple and sublime revelation of God's mind concerning His people, made at Sinai, is the occasion of a solemn cementing of the bond which Jehovah had graciously fashioned between Himself and Israel. The first Passover was Israel's virtual consecration to the service of Jehovah, this is his formal consecration. It is a covenant sealed by sacrifice. Half of the blood of the victims is poured upon the altar in token that God has performed His part of the covenant. The other half is kept, until the people have heard the words of the law and solemnly promised obedience. Then it is sprinkled upon them, and they on their part are bound. It is not that they have made anything of the nature of a bargain with the Most High God. He has deigned to make a covenant with them. They, by their

solemn promises, under the solemn sanction of the sprinkled blood of sacred victims, have entered into that covenant, and henceforth its awe-inspiring obligations, its great and precious promises, are theirs. "Ye shall be My people, and I will be your God."

To the Jewish Passover very explicitly, to the ratification of the Israelitic covenant indirectly, our Lord undoubtedly refers in His institution of the Supper which is called by His name. Possibly He had also in mind the prophetic passage¹ which tells of the making of a new covenant with Israel and Judah, when the law was to be written not on tables of stone, but on the inward table of the heart, when past iniquity would be freely forgiven, and all should know God from the least unto the greatest. In any case, our Lord in taking the old metal casts it into a new mould, puts upon it a new impress, gives it a new shape, and, by a wonderful transformation, makes it new, by making it His own. The taking and receiving of bread and wine appears to have been after the

¹ Jer. xxxi. 27-34, quoted in Heb. viii. 8-12.

Passover Supper, properly so called. The last Jewish Passover had now been held. Of the old covenant, with all its varied significance, all its hallowed associations, Christ might now have said, *It is finished*. All is not fully ready for the inauguration of the new, but the time is at hand, the moment of dawn has almost come. Ere a few supreme and crowded hours are past, hours fraught with passion and conflict even unto death, but fraught also with glory and rapture which change agony into triumph, a New Covenant will have been established, a Covenant sealed with Blood indeed. Our Lord anticipated that hour so soon to strike. Just as when Mary poured out upon Him her precious ointment, He said, "She hath done it for My burial," anticipating the coming death of which none knew but Himself, and giving to the offering of love a sacred, symbolical, sacramental significance, so, as He takes the bread into His hands and gives it to His disciples, He invests it with deep, mysterious meaning—See, take, eat, this is My body. As He takes the cup

and gives it to them all to drink, He says, This is My blood of the covenant, This is the new covenant in My blood. Thus is the way prepared in thought for the moment when Christ our Passover shall be sacrificed for us, when the new covenant, "not according to the covenant made with the fathers," shall be sealed by the blood of a sacrifice offered once for sins for ever. The form of the words looks back to the dispensation waxing old and ready to vanish away, their substance to a gracious relation about to be fully consummated, one which can never grow old or disappear, which is as eternal as God's mercy, as changeless as "the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord." And the moment when these words are uttered is the moment of institution of a sacred Memorial, which is to be a sign to all Christ's followers of this closest and tenderest of all bonds,—until such time as He shall come again and bring all His work for all His redeemed ones to its completion in glory everlasting. Such a memorial of uttermost love what Christian can slight or neglect?

Such a festival of eternal redemption what Christian but will observe, as the Master appointed, with reverent and holy joy?

Let us briefly gather up for meditation the teaching of this simple but profoundly significant narrative of institution.

1. Our Lord "blessed" the bread or "gave thanks," ere He brake it. He did the same before He distributed to His disciples the loaves and fishes which were to feed the five thousand in the wilderness. The upward look of thanksgiving for good things received, of prayer for blessing upon good things to be enjoyed, consecrates the commonest food and may make every meal a means of grace. "Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified through the word of God and prayer."¹ But in this case the blessing of Christ gives a special significance to the common elements of bread and wine. They had stood on the table before, and all had partaken of them in common. Now they

¹ 1 Tim. v. 4, 5.

are to be set apart for a special purpose; Christ's words "sanctify" them. So it was in a certain sense with the lamb and bitter herbs, the unleavened bread and wine of the Passover. Before the first cup at the festival was drunk, the head of the family was accustomed to offer a short prayer, "Blessed art Thou, Jehovah our God, who hast created the fruit of the vine"; and before the company partook of the unleavened cakes he would say, "Blessed be Thou, our God, King of the world, who bringest forth bread out of the earth." What words our Lord uttered at this stage we do not know, nor dare we try to guess. But the solemn words which fell from His lips may well have contained a reference to that coming Passion which we know was pressing upon His heart at the meal He had so eagerly desired to take with His disciples, "before I suffer." So, before the bread and wine are distributed at the Lord's Table, let our hearts be lifted up in thanksgiving, our souls poured out in prayer which shall "sanctify" for us the common elements—"Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!"

2. Christ distributed bread and wine to each of His disciples, with the words, "Take, eat"; "Drink ye all of it." He fastens attention upon an act to be performed by themselves. This could not but awaken surprise. They had already been eating and drinking at the meal, what could there be of special import in this participation? Eating and drinking are amongst the commonest acts of life. They are necessary for the maintenance of life. Bread and wine (mixed with water) were plain articles of everyday consumption. Attention would certainly be arrested when the Saviour prefaced such a simple act with a formal introduction—Eat, drink, all of you. It was by no means uncommon for the Old Testament prophet to perform some simple act with symbolic meaning, by way of impressing his message upon the minds of the people. So Isaiah walked half-clad and barefoot; so Agabus bound his hands and feet with St. Paul's girdle.¹ The disciples would be prepared by the act which Jesus had bidden them do, for some lesson

¹ Isa. xx. ; Acts xxi. 11.

to accompany it, and they were not disappointed. As before this they had asked "Is it I?" when the almost incredible statement had startled them, "One of you shall betray Me"; so now they would inwardly ask, "Why am I to eat, to drink? Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" The table, with its "fair white cloth," spread in Christian worship, prompts a similar question, "Why eat and drink? Cannot spiritual lessons be taught in a spiritual way? Why the command for all time—Take, eat: Drink ye all of it?" The soul which reverently asks such questions is prepared to receive an answer; and every time we see the elements spread at the Lord's Supper, we need to ask afresh before the service, "Why does the Lord bid me now to eat and drink, and what am I at this moment to do if I would be prepared to profit spiritually by so ordinary and familiar an outward act?"

3. Jesus said, *This is My body which is (given) for you.* The words can hardly have been misunderstood by the disciples, it is

hard to see why they should ever have been misunderstood since. The form of speech was familiar. Jesus said, I am the Door, I am the true Vine, I am the Good Shepherd; ye are the light of the world, ye are the salt of the earth, and no one could fail to understand His meaning. On another occasion He said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. But He spake of the temple of His body." Doubtless in the last case there was misunderstanding, and the form of words was chosen to set His hearers thinking. It was similarly chosen in the present instance, the strong expression "This is My body" inevitably leading to the thought, "In what sense can this bread represent or set forth the body of the Master?" In the account of the giving of the cup, the slight variation in form shows that the apostles from the beginning understood the figurative form of speech which Jesus had used. He does not say, "This is My blood," but "This is My blood of the covenant," understood in the same sense as "This cup is the new covenant in

My blood." But if none of the apostles would dream of understanding the word "is" literally, as so many Christians have interpreted and still interpret it, on the other hand our modern word "represents" is too faint and feeble to set forth our Lord's thought. The words, "Take, eat, this is My body," were intended to bring the disciples, and doubtless did bring them, immediately to the point that they were called upon to enter into, a very close relation with the Master Himself. It is as if He had said, "Forget the material bread which is between your teeth, and think of Me and your relation to Me. Closer to you than the bread and wine which help to form your blood and pass into your system, more intimately related to your life than the food without which you must die, am I! My body, My blood; have you yet learned what these are to you?" Peter had probably not learned this deep secret, nor James, nor John, nor Philip, nor the rest. We may well ask ourselves, How much have we learned of this lesson, of which more is to be learned every

time we set ourselves to master it at Christ's feet, by the power of the Spirit?

4. We have paused in our exposition, perhaps unwarrantably, in the middle of a sentence, but the words upon which we have commented are the only ones which St. Matthew and St. Mark give as accompanying the delivery of the bread. St. Luke and St. Paul add, "which is (given) for you," while St. Matthew and St. Mark both give an additional clause explaining that the blood "is shed for many (for the remission of sins)." St. Luke says, "even that which is poured out for you." Bread broken, wine poured out, point not to a living body with blood flowing in its veins, but to life given up and laid down. The additional clauses fix this meaning. The surrender of the life is for those present and for many, many more; it is given on behalf of others, "unto," or so that they may attain, remission of sins. How simple the words, how stupendous the meaning! Let us take them in their simplicity for the moment, without seeking to pass beyond them. The problem of the

universe solved; the deepest need of the individual conscience and heart met and satisfied! That which beyond and above all things else I need, for present relief and future safety, that my sins, so many, so dark, so aggravated, so burdensome, should be put away, "as far as the east is from the west," remitted, so that they shall appear against me no more for ever—this is salvation, this is life indeed. That bread, that wine, are to be received with the Saviour's words in the ears—Take, eat; receive, drink: My body is given, My blood is poured out for thee—for the remission of thy sins. Shall any opportunity of receiving afresh that assurance be slighted or neglected?

5. Jesus said, "This do in remembrance of Me," or more literally, "unto My remembrance," so that I may not be forgotten. Did the Saviour then desire for His own sake to be remembered? That is not said, or implied. If it were, it would but touch our hearts, as it touches them to read how the Son of Man made earthly friends and desired human sympathy. If this meaning

were present in the words, they would but harmonize with the suggestion in "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied," that the Saviour longs with a great longing for the full accomplishment of His great work of salvation, and instituted a visible memorial of His self-sacrificing love that it should ever be kept before the minds of those whom He came from heaven to save.

But the need for "remembrance" is in us, not in Him. Alas! He knows but too well how prone we are to forget, and that spiritual reminders alone are not sufficient for men "who still their bodies feel." The Divine wisdom of the appointment is only less noticeable than the Divine love which prompted it. Even for apologetic purposes in the defence of the Christian religion against adversaries, this positive institution has proved of great value. A whole volume has been written dealing with this aspect only of the Lord's Supper.¹ An outward observance embodies inward beliefs in a way which

¹ *Evidential Value of the Eucharist.* Boyle Lectures, by Dr. G. F. Maclear.

cannot be gainsaid, and the fact that the Lord's Supper was observed by Christ's disciples from the very beginning is a proof of the way in which He was regarded from the beginning. The doctrine of salvation through His death cannot have been an afterthought of later generations, and those who reverently commemorated together His death as the means of life to all mankind must have viewed the Son of Man as also Son of God.

But this is, of course, only an incidental use of this sacred institution, though one of importance in its place. Other uses will meet us later on ; enough if for the moment we hear Christ as if speaking to the individual heart, *Do thou this in remembrance of Me.* That the Lord Jesus Christ should for any reason bid me do anything so that I may not forget Him is more than enough for the true disciple. If He had bid us do some great thing so as to keep Him in perpetual remembrance, which of us would not have strained every nerve to accomplish it ? How much more when He says, *Take, eat ; Drink ye all of it—in remembrance of Me ?*

II

Christ's Teaching concerning Spiritual Food

IT will have been noticed that in the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper the name of St. John is absent. The reasons of his silence are to be found in the circumstances under which his Gospel was written and his object in writing it. His Gospel presupposes and is supplementary to the rest. When he wrote, Christian institutions were fully established and largely taken for granted. Moreover, throughout the Gospel St. John selects incidents, discourses, and aspects of Christ's ministry for a specific purpose, to illustrate the view of His Person and work which he himself tells us he wrote to impress upon the minds of a later generation.¹

¹ Ch. xx. 31.

The Divine Spirit guided him to select amongst his materials according to principles which we can only partially recognise.

But St. John has preserved for us a precious record which more than compensates for the absence of another account of the institution. Just as in his Gospel there is no account of the appointment of Christian baptism, but the third chapter contains an invaluable discourse on that which baptism symbolises; so, while there is no mention of the Lord's Supper, St. John gives us the fullest and most instructive teaching concerning the spiritual truths especially set forth by it. We refer, of course, to the long discourse, or series of discourses, uttered by our Lord after the Feeding of the Five Thousand and recorded in John vi. 22-59. It would be a mistake to describe this as a Eucharistic discourse. Allusions to an institution not yet in existence would be useless and unintelligible. There is nothing in the language which requires a reference to a religious ceremony of any kind. On the other hand, the form of the addresses, inter-

rupted as they frequently were by remarks and questions, shows that Christ was dealing directly with the state of mind exhibited by the multitude and those who are called "the Jews," usually the most thoughtful and active of His religious opponents, belonging mainly to the party of the Pharisees. None the less do our Lord's words at Capernaum explain and illustrate the meaning of the Lord's Supper more fully than any to which we can turn. He is here engaged with the spiritual realities which the Supper symbolises, and it is not to be wondered at if the very form of words employed is often most instructive, not only as regards the spiritual truths taught, but as to the form of observance afterwards directly enjoined. It was immediately after the delivery of this discourse that Christ said, "The spirit quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, are spirit, and are life." Spirit and life all will find them who will study them in close connection with the Christian institution which afterwards gave outward embodiment to their

teaching. Let us see what they contain for us.

The discourse as a whole falls naturally into three parts, of which we are chiefly concerned with the last. After the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the multitude sought out Jesus, to make Him a king. He retired from their misguided importunity, but they found Him at last at Capernaum, and Christ took the opportunity of teaching them a lesson concerning the meaning of the sign He had worked, and concerning spiritual food generally; see verses 25-40. The people needed to be taught to desire and work for imperishable meat, but no "works" were necessary such as they seemed anxious to engage in; all might be summed up in the one spiritual work of believing in Him whom the Father had sent and sealed—that is, solemnly set apart and authorised—for this special purpose. The people were not satisfied, however, and plied Him with further questions, expecting apparently some more conspicuous sign of His Divine mission, like the

manna, bread from heaven, "angels' food," with which Israel had been supplied in the wilderness. Christ therefore impressed upon them that He Himself was His own chief sign, that everything depended upon their personal relation to Himself, and He employs very lofty language concerning Himself, the Divine authority which He possessed, and the Divine blessing He and He alone could impart. He tells His hearers that He is "the true bread from heaven," "that which cometh down out of heaven and giveth life unto the world"; He is "the bread of life, he that cometh to Me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." He knows and will keep His own; the Father has sent Him for the purpose, in order that "every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on Him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Such language as this was sure to offend. Who is this who makes such claims? How can Jesus, son of Joseph, claim to have come down out of heaven? A second part of the

discourse is uttered to meet this not unnatural murmuring, verses 43-51. Instead of removing difficulties, Christ seemed to increase them. Instead of abating His pretensions, He uttered them more distinctly, and gave intimation of yet more mysterious claims. Murmur not, He said; those who are ready to learn, will learn. Spiritual insight does not belong to a nation, nor a caste; spiritual things are spiritually discerned, those who listen to the inward voice, who follow the inward strivings and drawings which they well know to be Divine, will perceive the truth of My words. The promise of the Messianic period will be fulfilled, and *all* shall be taught of God, but only those who yield to the secret inward monitions and whispers will have grace to cast prejudices and doubts to the winds and come to Me to learn concerning the Father that which only the Son can teach them. The bread that I give will not be like the manna which fed a few perishing bodies in the wilderness, but like the tree of life which man missed in Paradise through his own fault and folly.

He who eats of this bread shall live for ever. And then, as a last and crowning sentence, Christ utters a word which was truly a flash of light to illumine the meaning of the rest, but which seemed only to deepen the darkness of those who listened to Him—"the bread which I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world."

The murmurs deepen, the perplexity grows. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" It was apparently after some interval, in the synagogue at Capernaum, that Christ met the spoken and unspoken questions of those who were staggered by the claims He was making for Himself. Probably St. John has condensed into a few verses the contents of several colloquies, recording only the most significant of the words uttered by Christ at a very important crisis in His ministry. The deepest words of all are those which we find in verses 53-58; they were the hardest for the Jews to understand, and are those which bear most directly upon our subject. The Jews asked, "How can

this man give us his flesh to eat?" Probably their difficulty was not that of the utterly materialistic hearer, who cannot understand a figure of speech, and interprets the phraseology with absurd literalness. Nicodemus asked a similar question, most likely in a similar spirit. He said, How can a man be born when he is old? A master in Israel was not likely to understand the "entering into his mother's womb" in any literal sense, but the entire renewal of a man whose character and habits were formed seemed to him as incredible and impossible as a literal second birth. So the Jews were not bewildered by the figure of speech, but were staggered, as with their views of Christ they well might be, with the idea that one man could in any sense so impart himself to others as to infuse life into them, and especially that this man, so familiar and obscure a figure amongst his contemporaries, should have any such power. They "strove among themselves," some being apparently impressed by Christ's words and prepared to accept Him as an inspired teacher, others

objecting to the bold and paradoxical character of His claims.

Christ plunges deeper still into mystery. He has been leading His hearers up a steep mountain-side, and they have found it hard to follow Him. They pause and gasp for breath. Instead of resting with them or allowing them to descend a little, He climbs higher than ever. He insists upon the absolute necessity of feeding upon Him, and assimilating what He has to give, if any life worth the name is to be possessed and enjoyed. But now He expands the idea of spiritual nourishment by speaking both of eating and drinking, and no longer He speaks merely of Himself, but of His flesh and His blood. These words point distinctly to His death. The separation of flesh and blood, and especially the mentioning of "blood" apart, would convey to a Jew at once the idea of sacrifice and the shedding of that "blood wherein is the life." The word used for "eat" here is remarkable, and its use may well at first startle us. It is a word used more of animals than of men, and describes

not the mere fact of eating, but the process as a process, continued and dwelt upon with pleasure. It makes the paradox sharper, as it makes the meaning more significant. The harder the shell, the sweeter the kernel. Christ presses upon His hearers the closeness, the completeness, the necessity of an intimate relation with Himself, but especially with Himself as dying, giving Himself up for the life of the world, with a strength and persistency which made it indeed a "hard saying" for the moment, but makes His teaching in this place as marrow and fatness for those who desire to be spiritually fed. Most of all does every word become charged with significance when we read it in the light of the ordinance which Christ appointed later, to be observed by His followers through all time.

1. The apostles would remember these words of the Saviour when at the Last Supper He instituted the festival of remembrance. We may well take some portion of them with us for special meditation when we keep this Christian feast. Just as the

Lord Jesus Christ bade the Galileans look away from the meal which He had provided them, and care chiefly for spiritual food, so He bids us look away from the material elements, or look up from them to Himself. All concentration of attention upon the material vehicle tends to superstition. In time it becomes a worship of "the Blessed Sacrament," instead of a study of Christ Himself. As Christ, in answer to all the questions of the multitude, continually brought them back to Himself, His Person, the revelation of God which was to be found not merely in His miracles or in His words but in His very self, so does the Master speak to all His followers who gather at His table. There is only one Form and Figure to be seen there. All that we need is included in a vision by faith of the Lord Himself. "Look unto Him and be saved," says Isaiah; "Consider Him," is the significant exhortation given in the Epistle to the Hebrews. A glance means much, when it is directed to the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The

Divine glory of His face! This it is which illumines and rejoices the hearts of those who gather at His table.

2. But a look is not sufficient. Christ impresses upon those who were anxious to "work the works of God" and enjoy the bread of life, that everything depends upon their being in living relation with Himself. He employs many different phrases, but all lead up to the same point. "He that cometh to Me," "he that believeth on Me," "every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on Him," such are some of the expressions used. To come to Him in trust and confidence seems easy indeed, though some find the lesson harder than they thought when they set themselves to learn it for the first time. There are some difficulties which beset those who have come often and trusted long. It is not always easy to renew this simple act, as it should be renewed when we come to the table of the Lord. Often it is easy enough. Trouble drives us to Christ, temptation makes us feel our dependence upon Him, or His promises draw our souls

with such tenderness and eagerness of desire, that we run to Him as children to their mother's arms, fly to Him as homing birds to their nests under the eaves. Sometimes, however, the soul is not prompt and responsive, and the invitation to the Lord's Table may seem to call us only to a familiar and often repeated act, which has lost its freshness of interest, because we have lost the freshness of our faith and love. In such cases it is well to begin at the beginning, to become as little children, recall first principles, and so return to first love. "Coming as at first I came"—that is always possible. There is always enough in our lives to repent of, enough to awaken contrition and the sense of need, always enough in Christ to bring back anew that heart-whole belief in Him which first brought peace to our souls. In any case He says, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." Once more, then, we come, having learned that in maintaining our relation to Him by faith lies our very life itself. Our "life is hid with Christ in God."

3. But this is not enough. We may do this in prayer, or in listening to the words of Christ as a teacher. If this had been all that He taught in the synagogue at Capernaum, though the Jews might have been surprised, they would not have been offended. A much closer relation is indicated by the words, "he that eateth Me," "he that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood," "he that eateth this bread, My flesh which I give for the life of the world." It is this additional element, moreover, to which emphasis is given in the act of eating and drinking which forms the outward sign in the Lord's Supper. How is faith to be helped by this form of words, one from which, perhaps, in our reverence we somewhat shrink? How did Christ intend faith to be helped by the only rite which He Himself appointed to be continually repeated in remembrance of Him?

(1) We are taught that our life depends upon our relation to Another. No man can live without food, and Christ tells us that unless we eat this heavenly food, partake as

it were of His very self by faith, we "have no life in us." It is needless to say that this implies His Divinity. No mere man can thus minister to another's life, still less to all men's lives. We can cheer one another, help one another, carry one another; we cannot make another to live; that "must be let alone for ever."¹ Well might the Jews ask, How can this man, or any man, impart life to us by giving us himself? Man lives as regards his body by bread, and as regards his higher nature by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Only the Eternal Word can claim to be that living bread of which if a man eat, he shall live for ever.

(2) So much is true of all creatures in their measure, for "in Him all things consist," without Him nothing can continue in being. But sinners need more than this, and the prominent thought of the latter part of Christ's discourse is that our life comes through His death. The flesh which communicates life is that which has been given for

¹ Ps. xlix, 8, R.V.

the world; the blood which is drink indeed is that which is poured out for many, for the remission of sins. The mystery of love is God in self-sacrifice. God stooping to the uttermost in humiliation, bearing to the uttermost in sympathy with our sorrows, giving Himself to the uttermost in the death of the Son upon the cross for our sins. Herein is love; herein also is life. Such food has life-giving and life-sustaining qualities, and no man who has not partaken of it has true life in him, for every man is a sinner.

(3) Whether we live or not, depends upon our partaking. No richest banquet can feed a hungry man, if he will not put forth his hand and take, open his mouth and eat and drink. Hence Christ says in the Supper: Take, eat, this is My body: Drink ye all of it, this is My blood of the covenant. Faith must make this rich provision her own. The marvel and the tragedy of human life is that, when all things are ready, men make light of the invitation and find excuses for not sitting down at the feast of the King's Son. They

are asked to stretch out the hand, yet they let it hang listless by the side, to "open the mouth wide and I will fill it," yet even such effort seems too great. Christians who long ago learned their lesson and have repeated it often through years of service, yet need to say it afresh as they draw near to the Lord's Table. In a sense the act is the same, in a sense it can never be the same. The act of trust in Christ as the one sacrifice for sins, the act of loving submission to Him to whom we owe our all, must always be the same in essence. But every stage of experience in the Christian life gives a new character to the act of "feeding on Him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving" as the one sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and for *my* sins. Repentance is deeper, faith is more potent, love is richer and stronger, and Christ becomes more to us, as we give ourselves more to Him. The profit of each appearance at His table largely depends upon the extent to which we can *afresh* "eat His flesh and drink His blood."

(4) It is not to be forgotten that eating implies assimilation. The food is not simply received into the hand, placed between the lips ; it is made our own, helping to renew the blood, the flesh, the nerves of the body. Eating is a vital act ; it cannot be performed by the mouth alone, it belongs to the whole body. Only a healthy man can eat so as to profit by his food, and the whole man must take part in the process, if it is to answer the end for which he eats at all. Faith belongs to mind and heart and will, it is not complete unless all the powers of man's nature are engaged. Nay, in the Christian life faith is not so much an act as a process. It implies continuance, leads to perseverance. The relation with Christ which He deigns to set forth under this familiar figure is one which cannot be realised by a transient act of trust, which touches and passes on. We must cling, adhere, abide. And the nature of the continuous trust thus exercised is shown to imply assimilation on our part. The particles of food become assimilated to the substance of the body, and no faith in

Christ dying for our sins is sufficient, which does not enable us to die with Him, in order that we may live with Him. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus," says St. Paul, "that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh." That is eating of flesh and blood given for the world, so that one may live indeed and live for ever. So to make Christ's death our own, as that in us His life may ever be shown forth—that is indeed to have learned the lesson of John vi., that is the object of the institution of the Lord's Supper.

If we are conscious of slender spiritual appetite, it will be well to take steps to increase it ere we draw near to His table. The loss of appetite implies loss of health. It may be that we have been indulging in unwholesome food ; it may be that we have gone too long without nourishment ; it may be that we have not rightly used what has been already given. But the promise is to the hungry and thirsty ; they only can be filled at this table. If we "exercise ourselves unto godliness," appetite will not fail. A

man who toils hard to do his duty in a sinful world soon knows what it is to feel exhausted and to need fresh supply. A man with tender conscience cannot live many hours without feeling his need of the atoning blood ; a man with true appreciation of what is meant by following Christ cannot pass a day without hungering and thirsting for that spiritual supply without which he faints and fails. If we are not hungry for that which Christ offers to give at His table, why is it? Conscience must answer. But without such appetite we are not likely to eat much ; even the little will be taken without relish, and therefore without benefit. The multitudes to whom Christ spoke in Capernaum relished the loaves and fishes, but turned away from the sermon. The Jews in the synagogue, anxious to understand all this teacher's secrets, were more and more repelled, as He took them deeper into His confidence. Even many of the disciples who had hitherto companied with Him, "turned away and walked no more with Him," after these His "hard" sayings. Lack of appetite

means lack of nourishment, and continued lack of nourishment means death. The Twelve, represented by Peter, their spokesman both in wisdom and in folly, in rash self-confidence and warm-hearted allegiance, expressed their determination to cling the more closely to Him who had spoken to them "words of eternal life," and shown that He could give them eternal life itself. Our prayer in each approach to the table of the Lord may well be for increase of that spiritual appetite which shall enable us to comply with His gracious invitation: "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

III

The Lord's Supper in the Early Church

IF we were in any doubt concerning the exact meaning of our Lord's words when He bade His disciples eat and drink in remembrance of Him, it would be set at rest by an examination of the practice of the apostles and the Apostolic Church. How did the apostles interpret the words heard at one of the most solemn moments of their lives? The Scripture records are naturally scanty. The Acts and the Epistles do not cover many pages, all told, and they are not primarily concerned with the details of religious services. But enough is told us to make tolerably clear both the mode and the spirit of the observance of the Lord's Supper in the early Christian Church.

The Church was founded at Pentecost. Only after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was it possible for the apostles and their followers fully to understand the truth, to preach with power, and to organise converts into a community. In the very earliest verses which describe the immediate effects of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, we have a twofold mention of the observance of the Lord's Supper in the primitive community. The terms are general and the reference is brief, but it would be easily understood at the time, and there can be no doubt about its meaning. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . . And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people."¹ If these words stood alone, we might perhaps understand them to refer to ordinary meals, though even

¹ Acts ii. 42, 46.

then it would be certain that a sacred character of some kind must have been given to the meal for it to be mentioned in such a connection. Other passages to be examined later and our knowledge of subsequent history enables us to be sure that "the breaking of bread" here described has special reference to a sacred service of a very simple kind, held in obedience to Christ's command. It is, however, plain that this was held in conjunction with an ordinary meal. The little community were bound together by very close bonds, to some extent shared their goods, and often ate their meals together. At certain times, in connection with one of these united repasts, they ate bread and drank wine in remembrance of their Lord. So it was at the time of the original institution; the Passover meal had been eaten in common, then Christ hallowed a portion of the meal in the way we have seen, by a use of bread and wine for a special object. So it seems to have been in the earliest days of the Church; they worshipped in the temple, and in

private ate occasionally together, a portion of the meal being constituted into a religious service, fulfilled, as all would acknowledge, according to Christ's own appointment.

This becomes clearer, when we read in Acts xx. 7, "And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight." The Church at Troas was evidently accustomed to gather on the first day of the week for worship. An evening meal was probably enjoyed in common, but the gathering together "to break bread" can only refer to a religious participation, such as we know from other sources had become the general custom.

St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, deals with the matter at greater length. It is instructive to observe that we owe these fuller particulars to the fact that serious abuses had sprung up in connection with this matter. Had all proceeded in order, such casual mention of "bread-breaking"

as we have already adduced would have been all the information handed down to us. The passages, 1 Cor. x. 14-22, and xi. 17-34, should be read, though the latter only concerns us at present. It is clear that the Corinthians partook of a meal together, but they had been in the habit of doing it in such a way that it was "not possible to eat the Lord's Supper."¹ Rich and poor sat down together, but the meal was not really shared; each man was anxious to get before the rest "his own supper," so that whilst one man had too much, another had not enough. Some even drank too freely of the wine which should have been sparingly enjoyed by all, and the wealthy showed at the same time their selfishness, their intemperance, and a certain gross contempt for Christ's commands and the very meaning of Christ's ordinance, "despising the Church of God, and putting them to shame that had not" as plentiful a supply as themselves. The indignation of St. Paul makes itself burningly felt through-

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 20, R.V.

out his restrained rebuke of these outrages upon Christian decorum and fatal perversions of Christian ordinance. It is in this connection that he solemnly repeats the Saviour's words of institution, in order that he may shame the men who were changing the simplicity and reverence of the original observance into the self-indulgence and excess of a Greek club-supper. We seem to see the awe upon his face as he recalls the majestic and pathetic words of the Master, and strives to restore to its original beauty and solemnity the rite which had been thus basely degraded.

One more reference remains, similar language being used in two Epistles which can be shown to have a very close connection with each other—Jude and 2 Peter. In the former we read, ver. 12, "These are they who are hidden rocks in your love-feasts, when they feast with you, shepherds that without fear feed themselves"; in the latter, ii. 13, "men that count it pleasure to revel in the day-time, spots and blemishes, revelling in their love-feasts while they feast

with you.”¹ Without entering upon the painful subject of the abuses here referred to, and the false brethren who introduced mischief thus early into Christian assemblies, it is enough to say that these passages prove the existence in apostolic times of the Agapé, or love-feast, which we have been describing, and which lasted on in the Church for two or three centuries. The Lord's Supper was not the love-feast, but it was held in connection with it. Bread, wine, fish, meat, milk, honey, were provided, chiefly by the richer members of the community, and all ate freely together. Towards the close of the meal a special blessing or thanksgiving was offered over bread and wine separately partaken of, “in remembrance,” and afterwards the company joined in prayer, in singing, and religious fellowship. In process of time the character of the meal changed. In places like Alexandria it became a social entertainment for

¹ A various reading gives “deceits” instead of “love-feasts.” So A.V., “sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you.”

the wealthy; in Western Africa and elsewhere, a mere dole or distribution to the poor. The Lord's Supper came to be separated from the love-feast, the latter fell into disuse, and in the fourth century its observance in churches was forbidden.

We may pursue a little further our examination into the practice of the early Church, shedding light as it does upon the history of the ordinance and upon the way in which it should be observed to-day. Immediately after apostolic times, about the year 110 A.D., Pliny, a Roman governor in Asia Minor, wrote to the Emperor Trajan an account of the new religious sect of the Christians, who were multiplying rapidly in his province. He inquired particularly as to their beliefs and customs, and elicited amongst other things that "the sum of their error consisted in this: on an appointed day, before dawn, they were accustomed to assemble and repeat in alternate parts a hymn to Christ as God; they then bound themselves by an oath (*sacramentum*) not to commit any crime, but to abstain from

robbery, theft, or adultery; to avoid every breach of faith; and never to refuse, when called upon, a deposit which had been entrusted to them; and when these rites had been performed, it was their custom to disperse, and again to assemble for the purpose of partaking in common a meal of an entirely harmless nature." This and similar information was obtained by the use of torture from two young deaconesses, and it bears traces of having been marred, as was likely, in the getting. The picture drawn by an unsympathetic outsider who had extracted what knowledge he had from two poor tortured girls, enables us, however, to see clearly enough the little company of slaves and obscure persons meeting by stealth, worshipping their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, joining in a common meal, and binding themselves by a sacramental promise to Him, not, as their adversaries asserted, of some unnatural and abominable kind, but more faithfully to fulfil the ordinary duties of life, to be true and honest and pure and kind, and live, as far as might be, like Him

whose passion and death on their behalf they had been sacredly commemorating together.

Another early document, dating from about the same period, or a little later, is called "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," and is a kind of tract or pamphlet containing a number of moral precepts, some rules concerning prayer, baptism, and other matters, ending with a solemn reference to the second coming of Christ. Amongst the rules for worship we find reference to the Lord's Supper, called *Eucharistia* or Giving-of-thanks. The writer says: "But with regard to the Eucharist, give thanks after this manner. First, with regard to the cup, We give thanks to Thee, our Father, for the holy vine of Thy servant David, which Thou hast made known to us through Thy servant Jesus, to Thee be glory for ever. But with regard to the broken bread, We give thanks to Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which Thou hast made known to us through Thy servant Jesus, to Thee be glory for ever. As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, and gathered together became

one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom, for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever." Further thanksgivings are quoted, to be used at the end of the service, whilst the "prophets," who were understood to speak under the more immediate influence of the Spirit, were to "give thanks as they will."

About a generation later, in A.D. 150, Justin Martyr wrote a Defence of the Christians, in which occurs an interesting description of the way in which the Lord's Supper was then celebrated. "At the end of our prayers we salute one another with a kiss. Then there is brought to him who presides over the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe. . . . And when the president has given thanks and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was

pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion. And this food is called among us the Eucharist. . . . For not as common bread and drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the word of God for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread," etc. Here follows an account of the original institution of the Lord's Supper, quoted as an authority for the practice, just as St. Paul quotes it in 1 Cor. xi. In a subsequent chapter Justin describes how "on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time

permits," after which exhortation is given, prayer offered, and bread and wine are brought, partaken of with thanksgiving, and a collection made for the poor.¹

These are glimpses only into primitive usage, but they teach their own lesson. Unfortunately, before long this usage became corrupted. By the middle of the next century, in the time of Cyprian, from whom so much of what is called ecclesiastical "development"—what in many respects must be regarded as ecclesiastical corruption—proceeded, other ideas with regard to the service had begun to creep in, and other modes of celebrating the Christian festival obtained. These grew as time went on, until the scriptural ordinance and the primitive meal had passed into the "sacrifice of the mass," with celebrating priests, a non-communicating people, elaborate ceremonies and dresses, processions and genuflexions, candles and bells, an unheard service conducted in an unknown tongue, and all the

¹ Abbreviated from Justin's *First Apology*, chapters 65-67.

accompaniments of a "mystery" in which bread and wine were changed into the very body and blood of Christ. That process we have no need to trace, and to the errors which have led to it we shall refer as little as possible. We recall the simplicity of the earliest Christians, and desire as far as may be to preserve or to reproduce it. The connection of the religious service with an actual meal is a detail which, as we have seen, soon led to abuse, and was discontinued. Otherwise, the simplicity and beauty of primitive observance may well serve as type and model for all time. If we can preserve the *idea* of the service as Christ intended it and the apostles carried it out, we shall have the guidance we need for our own observance of it. Before gathering up the teaching of Scripture and of apostolic practice into brief compass for present guidance, it will help us if we consider the *names* by which the service was designated in New Testament times and the period immediately following.

(1) The earliest name, *breaking of bread*, which we have found to be used three times

by St. Luke, and which is obviously referred to by St. Paul in 1 Cor. x. 16, did not pass into current use. The phrase is found in Ignatius, and very occasionally afterwards. But it is an inadequate description of the service, and we cannot be surprised that it has not survived.

(2) The term *Lord's Supper* is found in 1 Cor. xi. 20, where the religious service is strongly contrasted with that portion of the meal which was taken to satisfy appetite. But the name did not pass into general use. In Tertullian we find the phrase, "the Lord's banquet," but the title did not become common till after the fourth century. In later times, Protestants have as a rule preferred it to any other, whilst Catholics object on several grounds to its use.

(3) The name *Communion* is founded upon St. Paul's expression in 1 Cor. x. 16, "The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ," where the word probably means "participation in"; it is, at all events, not a name for a religious service. As such it appears to have passed

into general use in the third century, and soon became very common. The general and somewhat ambiguous meaning of the name probably recommended it; inasmuch as in the Supper Christians partake in common of the elements and the blessings symbolised, and hold communion at the same time with Christ and one another.

(4) The name *Eucharist* properly denotes thanksgiving or blessing, and it was felt in very early times that this was a most appropriate name for a service in which giving of thanks occupied so prominent a place. The only place in which it has been thought to occur in Scripture is 1 Cor. xiv. 16, where St. Paul asks, if a man "bless in the Spirit," in an unknown tongue, "how shall he that filleth the place of the unlearned say the Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he knoweth not what thou sayest?" It is very doubtful whether the special meaning of *Eucharist* is to be found in this passage; but in any case we are sure that very soon after apostolic times this significant name had passed into familiar and favourite use.

It is found freely in Ignatius, Justin, and the Fathers of the second century.

The term sacrament, as we have seen, was not in use in the earliest times, but that which the name denotes was recognised by the apostles, as it has been, in one form or another, by all Christians since. The term "sacrament of the Eucharist" occurs early in the third century, and other phrases found are "sacrament of the cup," "sacrament of the passion." Even Luther uses the term "sacrament of the altar." The name "The Commemoration," a very beautiful and suggestive name, sacred because it leads so directly to our Lord's own words, has unhappily never become general. Nor has the term "Passover," which is found rarely in some early writers, founded partly upon St. Paul's expression in 1 Cor. x. 7, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast." The misuse of the term "sacrifice" in connection with this service must receive separate consideration. Enough to say that there is not the slightest warrant for it in Scripture, and that we find there no precedent

for the use of the term "altar," though we do find mention of "the Lord's table" in 1 Cor. x. 21. Through a large part of Catholic Christendom the term "mass" has for centuries prevailed to the exclusion of almost every other.

What impression is left upon our minds by this rapid survey of apostolic practice and Scripture precedent?

1. The first point, surely, is the freedom in which Christians are left as regards all details of observance, the very large measure of latitude permitted, if we accept Scripture only as our guide. The Protestant principle of insisting upon the supreme authority of Scripture is clearly the only safe one. If Scripture and "tradition" are to guide us, who shall say what is tradition and what corruption? If "primitive tradition," who is to define primitive? Great changes passed over ecclesiastical opinion and practice in the fourth and fifth centuries; are the Fathers of this period, differing widely amongst themselves, to be included amongst our authorities and guides? Turning to the

words of the Master Himself, to the teaching of the apostles and their practice so far as we are acquainted with it, we find no specific directions as to the time of observance, the form and order of service, the frequency of Communion, and a number of other topics, which are left to the practical wisdom of Christians in various ages and countries. The Koran prescribes the times and conditions of prayer, and amongst many nations religion means little else than the way in which certain rites are to be conducted. Christ gave the ordinance; time, place, circumstances, mode, are left to His followers.

Accordingly, those only can be said to contravene the New Testament who lay down rules for the valid observance of the Lord's Supper, of which its records know nothing. As, for example, in condemning the evening observance of an ordinance which was certainly instituted in the evening and at first always kept in the evening; or insisting upon what is called "fasting communion," that a night should intervene

between the last meal taken and the receiving of the bread and wine in the Communion service. However sincere and reverent the motives which prompt to such practices, they must be pronounced superstitious and misleading, whilst the dogmatism which ventures to prescribe them as rules for all Christians is as unscriptural as it is arrogant.

Neither does the New Testament expressly guide us as to the frequency of Communion. This to some extent depends upon circumstances. The first Christians appear to have held their simple service at least once a week, at one time perhaps every day. Through the history of Christendom practice has varied. In some churches the service is held many times a week, in others not oftener than once or twice a year. Sometimes it has been necessary to stir up the consciences of those who communicated too seldom, sometimes to check those in whom familiarity seemed likely to breed contempt. Much is left to the individual conscience. Many Christians have held that a monthly

Communion, regularly observed, marks a satisfactory middle course between extremes. So far as Scripture guides, this is too seldom rather than too often. But no rules can avail. Christian worship is of the spirit, not of the letter. A heart filled with love to Christ will determine its own times and seasons, knowing, however, the importance of allowing principle, not impulse, to direct him who would walk safely.

2. Another striking feature of New Testament practice in the observance of the Eucharist is its simplicity. The word used in Acts ii. 46, translated "singleness of heart," is beautiful and suggestive. The figure is drawn from the smoothness of a path or field which has been well cleared of stones, a state of mind in which are no ugly obstacles to progress arising from secondary motives and aims, double-mindedness, self-consciousness, or even hypocrisy. The directness and straightforwardness of early Christian character may be here intended ; but, as applied to worship, the word should denote that pure and lovely spirit of devotion which takes the

worshipper direct to God, without allowing him to be diverted by any thoughts, even of that which is intended to help and stimulate devotion. This, the loftiest, is perhaps the rarest of qualities in human worship. The more devout the spirit, the greater often appears to be the desire to multiply means and appliances which may promote or guard devotion; and all experience has shown that in this, more perhaps than in any other way, does the channel of grace become blocked up by obstacles of man's own interposing. Nowhere is it more necessary to remember this than in connection with the two exceedingly simple rites which are the only ones Christ has ordained in His Church. Let simplicity rule above all else in the observance of the Lord's Supper. Let the window be as clean and clear as possible, that Christ's own light may shine through it unrefracted and undimmed.

3. The other word used in Acts ii. 46, translated "gladness," will receive more fitting comment elsewhere. It indicates joy approaching to rapture, and shows us that,

as in all the religion of the early Church, so especially in this its most characteristic expression, the predominating emotion was joyful confidence. This does not interfere with reverence or solemnity, it is consistent even with the abasement and awe which must characterise a sinner coming before a holy God. It is not compatible with anything like slavish fear, and the emotion which some very good Christians appear desirous to cultivate in connection with the most solemn service of their religion is one of fear rather than of exultant joy. But many times in history, a period of revival of religion has witnessed a return to this characteristic of primitive Christianity. Christians have "not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear"; the joy of the Lord is their strength. Most of all is this the case when the thought of themselves is lost in the thought of what Christ has done for them, when the thought of their sins is swallowed in the thought of the greatness of their redemption. This should be pre-eminently characteristic of the spirit in which we approach the Lord's Table ;

so shall we find it possible always, like the earliest disciples of the Lord, to eat the sacred bread which reminds us of our salvation and Him who has wrought it out for us, "with gladness and singleness of heart."

IV

The Nature and Purpose of the Service

WE are thus brought to the central portion of our subject. Having gathered from Scripture the instruction which is to be found in the narratives of institution, in Christ's discourses, and in apostolic practice, we must ask more specifically what is the significance of this culminating act of Christian worship, why it was ordained as a perpetual service in the Church, and what is implied in attendance at the Lord's Supper on the part of every one who joins in the service with intelligence and devotion.

I. It is needful to say in the first place that the Lord's Supper is *not*, in the strict meaning of the word, a *Sacrifice*. It is, in familiar words, "this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving," and true praise forms a

very real and acceptable offering to God. But the ambiguity in the words "sacrifice" or "offering" has led to confusion, and it is for many reasons necessary to remove it. There are two words in Greek which have been used at different times to describe the Eucharist, one of which may be translated "oblation" or "offering," and the other "sacrifice." The former word was used in the earliest times, especially with reference to the bringing of gifts, first-fruits, bread and wine, or the giving of alms to the poor, which was specially associated with this service. In the same sense the word has been used in later times to represent the fact that in the Lord's Supper the worshippers present to God not only special thanksgivings, but the gift of themselves, yielding all they have to God in Christ, a "living sacrifice," a "reasonable service."

The latter word is properly applied to the bloody sacrifices under the Mosaic dispensation which made atonement for the sins of the people. Under the Christian dispensation there is one such Sacrifice, and one only:

"one sacrifice for sins for ever."¹ No true Christian can admit more than one Atoning Sacrifice, offered once for all by the One Saviour of mankind, Himself at the same time Priest and Victim. Nor do any Christians really intend to interfere with this fundamental truth of our salvation. But somewhat early in the history of Christendom, occasionally in the third and increasingly in the fourth century, a use of the word sacrifice as applied to the Lord's Supper appears, which since then has dominated a large part of Christendom. The memorial was by general consent a sign of the one great Sacrifice of the God-Man for the sins of the world, and the sign came to be put for the thing signified. It was perhaps not unnatural that the memorial of a sacrifice should be called a sacrifice. But a change passed over the teaching of a large part of the Church which amounted to a revolution in the view of this sacrament. The thankful com-

¹ Heb. x. 12. If the words "for ever" rather qualify "sat down at the right hand of God," the meaning is not substantially altered.

memoration of Christ's atonement with the fresh appropriation of it on the part of believers bringing their thank-offerings to God for the blessings of redemption, passed into the idea of an unbloody repetition of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, rendered possible by the real presence¹ of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated elements. Hence the body of Christ is supposed to be truly and literally offered afresh daily on a thousand altars by a sacrificing priesthood, who present to God upon earth that which Christ as High Priest presents before Him in heaven. Atoning efficacy is indeed attributed only to the death of Christ upon the cross, but sacramental value for the souls both of the living

¹ The phrase "Real Presence" as used by Catholic theologians does not mean the reality of Christ's presence in a spiritual sense. It has a technical meaning, partly explained below, and is usually opposed to that real presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in and through the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer which the Evangelical Protestant holds as the central truth of the Sacrament. Catholics, Roman, Greek, and Anglican, reverence the elements as being themselves mysteriously the vehicle of Christ's presence and the channels of grace to body and soul.

and the dead is attached to this perpetually renewed offering, in which "the eternal Son of God is veritably offered to God upon the altar by the visible hand of the priest for the sins of the world."

The view here indicated is not peculiar to the Church of Rome. That Church teaches what is called Transubstantiation, a miraculous change of the substance of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, while the outward appearance of the elements remains the same. But Lutherans and many Anglicans hold what is called Consubstantiation, the co-existence in the elements of what is truly bread and wine with the mystical but real presence of the body and blood of Christ. The doctrine of which we are speaking does not depend upon these distinctions. It is held by all who view the Eucharist as itself a sacrifice, instead of what it truly is, a feast on a sacrifice. As soon as the transition is made from the observance of the Lord's Supper as a thankful commemoration of Christ's one sacrifice to a perpetual spiritual repetition of that sacrifice

at the hands of a Christian priesthood, the important step is taken which changes its whole character. Indirectly, the meaning of the sacrifice on Calvary is weakened and lost. Practically, attention becomes concentrated upon its present earthly repetition. Regard is had to the material elements, the form of consecration, the validity of the sacrificing priesthood, the efficacy of the "intention" with which each separate "celebration" is held, and the devout attention of the worshipper is removed from Christ Himself to the reiterated act of the Church in and through her appointed priests. The worship of the Church becomes (unconsciously and unintentionally) materialised. With or without the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the outward form and order of the service in churches where this doctrine is held, testify to the depth and seriousness of the change. Questions of dress and appearance, of lights and ornaments, of the use of names such as altar and priest, are seen to be, not of secondary but of primary importance, when they imply serious modification of doctrine.

If the Lord's Supper be veritably a sacrifice—it is not too much to say—Christianity is changed from a spiritual religion to a series of carnal ordinances.

That there is no basis for this doctrine in Scripture hardly needs proof. Those who hold it are driven to the expedient of maintaining that Christ's words "*Do this*" mean "Offer this sacrifice." The only ground for so unwarrantable an interpretation is that the Greek word "do" is used in the Old Testament in connection with the offering of sacrifices. It does, of course, when applied to the word sacrifice, mean what we mean when we use the word "perform," or any other neutral expression. But to suppose that Christ, when addressing the disciples at the Last Supper, told them to offer a sacrifice, is as impossible as it is to find any hint in the apostolic writings that the festal meal held in commemoration of the Saviour's dying love was ever understood as a renewal of the sacrifice of Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews puts an end to any such imagination. The real defence of this doctrine lies

not in Scripture, but in the language of many of the Fathers. We are not concerned to argue with any who make an appeal to ecclesiastical authorities of any century final; but it may be well to point out that not till some centuries had elapsed did this view of the Lord's Supper obtain, still less prevail in the Church. Its revival and the frequent dogmatic assertion of it in this country at the present day has alone made this discussion necessary. If we follow Scripture, we cannot, dare not, admit that the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice.

2. But it is *not merely a memorial* of Christ's death. It is a memorial, pre-eminently. Christ said, Do this in remembrance of Me, and we gladly obey His word. But Christians do not gather at the table of the Lord to do what is done at the universities and some public schools on certain occasions—hold a service in commemoration of a departed benefactor. If Christ were simply a great teacher, like Socrates, in connection with whose death there was much that was pathetic and instructive, His followers might well meet to

recall His words, His last sufferings, the legacy of His patient and courageous example. But He is a living Lord. His relation to His followers is unique. When He gave the bread to His disciples, saying, This is My body, He did more than tell them to eat some bread from time to time and think of Him. What He gave was symbolic of a very great spiritual reality. To use a figure which has often been employed in this connection, he who gives the keys of a city virtually gives possession of the city. The act is symbolic, but it is more than symbolic, unless it is illusory. If he who has the right to yield up a city or a treasure-chest formally gives to any one the keys which open it, he has really surrendered the house. To give up the deeds is to give up the house, for more reasons than one.

These illustrations are not arguments, and as illustrations they are not complete. But the argument is drawn from the Person of the Saviour and the nature of His act. In giving to His disciples the sign, in the

way and with the words He did, He virtually promised to them the thing signified. Moreover, He intimated that in connection with the use of the sign the blessing symbolised was virtually pledged to those who were prepared to receive it. So the apostles appear to have understood the words. Very little is said, it is true, upon the subject, but St. Paul's language in 1 Cor. x. and xi. seems distinctly to show that there was a sacredness in the elements which many careless and profane Corinthian Christians had failed to perceive—a sacredness not drawn from any miraculous change that had passed over them, or any miraculous change that they, when consecrated, were able to effect, but a sacredness derived from the spiritual blessing which the bread and wine so far symbolised and were the means of conveying, that they could be called "the blood of Christ" and "the body of Christ." The sin which St. Paul condemned in these unspiritual men was that they did not "discern the Lord's body."

3. This is substantially what is meant

when we describe the Lord's Supper as a sacrament, and because a sacrament, therefore *a sign, a seal*, and (under certain conditions) *a means of grace*. That it is a sign of spiritual grace, no one is disposed to deny. By saying that it is a seal, is meant that it possesses and symbolically conveys the personal authority of Christ Himself. If He had not ordained the sacrament, it could not be a seal. Christians might agree together upon a suitable symbolical ceremony and observe it together in remembrance of their Saviour as a sign, but it would possess no authority, bring no pledge or assurance with it. When Christ gives a command He gives, either explicitly or implicitly, a promise. In this case the promise is implicit in the words, This is My body. When He bids His disciples do this in remembrance of Him, at the same time reminding them of the symbolical meaning of their act, He virtually pledges to them the benefits of that which was "given," "poured out," "for you," "for many," the blessings of the "new covenant in My blood." The seal in this

case hallows the document with all the high authority, all the sacred power, all the inviolable security implied in Divine love giving itself to the uttermost for the sins of men. This imparts to it a value which the sacredness of an earthly seal very inadequately represents. In instituting this sacrament Christ pledges Himself. He can do no more, we may claim no less. What wonder that His Church finds in this service a "holy mystery," full of spiritual comfort!

Hence it is that the observance of the Lord's Supper becomes a means of grace. It is so only under conditions; else we should be attributing to an outward act a kind of magical efficacy, which in the Christian religion implies little less than blasphemy. It will be said that prayer, praise, reading of the Scriptures, are also means of grace, and that this particular service cannot claim to be a channel of grace in any other sense than applies to these. Nor are we anxious to separate this highest of all acts of Christian worship from others

in *kind*. Nevertheless, it differs from them in *degree*. In it Christ has appointed a perpetual symbol bearing His own authority, and this, if received with faith as from Himself, may well be found a specially-honoured channel of His grace. That grace He will bestow anywhere, at any time, under any conditions, yet it is bestowed in richest and choicest measure upon those who unite in obeying His express command, in commemorating the great central feature of His work, and the one sufficient ground of man's present salvation and eternal hope.

By what means, however, is this grace secured? What are believers understood to declare and do on their part in this sacrament, and how—so far as it is possible for us to answer the question—is grace bestowed through this particular means? The significance of the Lord's Supper as an institution may best be explained in three parts, dealing severally with Christ's relation to man as a Saviour, the relation of the communicant to Christ, and the relation of Christians to one another.

(1) A striking expression is used by St. Paul in 1 Cor. xi. 26, "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come." The word translated "proclaim" means announce, publish freely by word of mouth. It may have been suggested by that formal exposition of the meaning of the Passover which was uttered by every head of the Jewish household at the celebration of the festival. It is, perhaps, more probable that St. Paul was thinking of the silent but even more effective proclamation of the rite itself. He asks the Galatians, "Who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified?" The "open setting forth" of the death of Christ by means of a rite so universally and so reverently observed as the Eucharist is very striking. It accompanies, not interferes with, still less supersedes, the proclamation of the preacher. In the Lord's Supper every man speaks for himself. "There is no speech nor language, their voice cannot be heard;" but the message has gone out through all the earth, its meaning is felt to

the end of the world. The great host of Christian disciples throughout all ages and in all climes "proclaim" that the object of all their faith, the ground of all their hope, is the death of One whom they believe to have died for the sins of all mankind. They point in His own words to the body given, the blood poured out, for them, for many, unto the remission of sins, and this proclamation is to continue to the end of time. "Till He come;" every observance of the Saviour's command is a link in a living chain, reaching from the time when He suffered upon Calvary to the time when He shall appear in glory, when He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, and death shall be for ever swallowed up of life.

But the light in which Christ's death is proclaimed must be clearly understood. The very words "till He come" show that He is to the Christian not a dead but a living Lord, and that whilst the believer trusts in the death of Christ upon the cross as the one sacrifice for sins, he does not in his worship rejoice in a kind of perpetuated

crucifixion. The Christian festival is unintelligible if Christ's work ended with His death on the cross. The glorified Saviour is at the right hand of God, there presenting for ever in intercession His completed sacrifice, which does not consist in death merely, but in life triumphant over death. Every Christian believes that Christ is spiritually present with His people when they meet at His table. The death, therefore, which is so precious to the sinner, as the crowning proof of the Saviour's love, the essential feature in the working out of the sinner's salvation, is taken up into the thought of death vanquished by life. "The death that he died, he died unto sin once; but the life that he liveth, he liveth unto God." Death hath no more dominion over Him. His name is "the Living One; I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore." It is of such a Saviour that with humble and adoring love we proclaim the death, as for us the gate of life, because when once He had borne the burden of the world's sin, He burst the bands of death, since "it

was not possible that He should be holden of it."

The appointment of such a rite for perpetual observance is of inestimable value to the Christian Church. It is a monument, a landmark, not easily removed. From the Lord's Supper, and the simple words of its institution, it is perhaps hardly too much to say that the whole of Christianity might be recovered and constructed. "Ideas mark the progress, sacraments the fixedness of Christianity." And not least amongst the varied and inexhaustible benefits of this sacrament is its ceaseless proclamation of the death of the now living and glorified Lord Jesus Christ as the central fact of human history, the central object of Christian faith, and the central ground of the Christian's and the world's hope.

(2) Christ spoke of a new covenant, sealed in His blood, of which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is at the same time the reminder and the pledge. What are the blessings of that covenant, and how may the communicant eat and drink "unto remem-

brance," so as to make these blessings his own? The relation of the believer to Christ is symbolised in many ways in this institution, each of which may be, as was intended, a great help to faith.

First and chief is that which Christ Himself names "remission of sins." It is with this that Christian life begins, this of which the dying saint longs to be assured when he passes from earth to stand before God. Renewal is impossible till the stain and burden of past sin is removed; and, however pure and holy a life any man has lived, he best knows how much he needs to the last the atoning and cleansing blood. There can be no one in the Christian Church to whom the promise of forgiveness is needless and useless, there can be no time in the Christian's history when the message which speaks peace through the forgiving love of God in Christ is not one of the standard blessings of spiritual experience. All who meet at the table of the Lord kneel there as sinners; all acknowledge the same Saviour; and to all who repent and trust comes the pledge and

assurance, as if from the Saviour's own lips, that the new covenant in His blood brings to them remission of sins.

For this, as for all other benefits of His passion, the devout communicant offers earnest thanksgivings by his very presence at the Lord's Table. He keeps the feast. Every form of service that has been used in the Christian Church includes this element; in some, notably the very earliest, it is rightly prominent. It is indeed "meet, right, and our bounden duty," that at all times we should praise God, but how unspeakably binding is the duty, felt only to be a joy, to sing together with the great host of Christ's redeemed ones, Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!

With such sacrifice God is well pleased; but it cannot be offered from a sincere heart without the accompanying surrender of self to Christ's service. "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then all died; and that He died for all that they which live should no more live to themselves, but to Him that died for them and rose again." One who

kneels in adoring acknowledgment of the love which encountered death and worse than death to save him, cannot withhold the allegiance which is the one thing asked in return. If the praise and thanksgiving be the peace-offering of the Eucharist, the consecration of self is the whole-burnt-offering; body, soul, and spirit, a living sacrifice, the life which He has redeemed and bestowed upon us gladly restored in loyal service to Him!

Jesus said, "Take, eat, this is My body"; laying stress, as we have already seen, upon the act of the disciple who in eating receives and uses that which will nourish his body. The Saviour could hardly have more plainly indicated that between Himself and His faithful follower is a relation of the closest kind, one of vital union, in which the believer (by the power of the Spirit) takes, as it were, of Christ Himself and appropriates that spiritual food to his own use for the maintenance of the new life which he has learned to live in the flesh, a life of faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself for

him. Christ used other figures to set forth this union, each possessing its own significance. I am the Vine, He said, ye are the branches. Ye are the sheep, I am the Shepherd. He is the Head, we are the members, say His apostles. But the force of language could hardly further go than when Christ said, "He that eateth Me, even He shall live by Me." The provision made; the need of appropriating faith; the living character of the union; the intimacy of relationship; the satisfaction of spiritual appetite; the nourishment afforded; the life maintained; the assimilation to Christ which is the end and aim of all; could hardly be more strikingly illustrated than in that act which Christ chose as a perpetual reminder, not only of His relation to us, but of our relation to Him. Every phrase in the last sentence is capable of full amplification, and each may be profitably used as a theme of devout meditation by those who draw near to the table of the Lord.

The form of participation, however, suggests to us the profound truth, that we

are to be united first of all to Christ in death, and in and through our death with Him are to enjoy life with Him for ever. First, we are to accept Him as our sacrifice, bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. We must know the fellowship of His sufferings, be made conformable unto His death, if we are to know the power of His resurrection. That is, not only for our justification, but for our sanctification we must know first the meaning of His death, then the meaning of the life which conquers death. "Ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." So the believer partakes severally of the broken bread and the poured-out wine, and is reminded not only that "by His stripes we are healed," but that by dying with Him we live again. Every Christian through his whole life says first, "I have been crucified with Christ," and then, "yet I live, and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." He rests upon the sacrifice of the cross for justification; he makes it his own in sanctification; and in both he "feeds on Christ in his heart by faith with thanksgiving."

From the Lord's Table we obtain a glimpse of life everlasting. The ordinance itself is a memorial "till He come," and the words are full of glorious suggestion concerning the consummation which such a prospect implies. But further, we have Christ's own word that whoso eateth His flesh and drinketh His blood hath eternal life. The seed and germ are here, the flower is yonder. Already in imperfect measure we are being made like Him; but He who has begun this good work in us will perfect it unto the day of Christ, the day when He shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself. He who sits at Christ's Table may already feel

Through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness.

(3) The relation of Christians to one another forms a very important element in the observance of the Lord's Supper. The word "communion," originally used in

another sense, has come to be understood very largely of the union of fellow-Christians, symbolised by their meeting at the Lord's Table. Christ did not refer to this in His words of institution, unless there be a hint of it in the phrase, "Drink ye *all* of it"; but all the accounts of that last evening with the disciples record how in one way or another the Saviour emphasised the importance of their loving one another, and seeking to serve rather than to rule one another.

St. Paul brings out this point more distinctly in 1 Cor. x. 17, where he says, "For we being many are one bread (loaf), and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." The verse which immediately precedes contains the same lesson, not so clearly brought out. In the words, "the cup which we bless, the bread which we break," the word "we" refers not to a priestly act performed by apostles or presiding officers, but to that common act of thanksgiving and partaking of food, in which all joined together, thereby both testifying

to their unity in Christ and cementing it. In some churches it is the practice for the bread, carefully broken into pieces beforehand, to be built up in the form of a loaf, that the unity in diversity and diversity in unity of the Church may be visibly represented. And, as we have already seen, one prayer in use in the early Church represented the same idea in another form: "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, and gathered together became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom."

Both of these are probably attempts in different ways to embody St. Paul's thought. He leads us, however, deeper than either. The unity which exists in the Church springs from common participation in one life, which is evermore maintained and nourished by feeding upon one bread—Christ Himself. It is because He is one that His people are one. They can only enter into true communion with one another in proportion as they are living by

communion with Him. He who *truly* partakes of Christ in the sacrament of the Supper *is* one with every one else who truly partakes. He may acknowledge it or not, realise it or not; but all who partake that life are of one stock, one body, for they "all partake of the one bread." For Christians to have fellowship with Him implies a measure of fellowship one with another, for a brother cannot disown a brother whose life equally with his own springs from the same source and has been nourished by the same care.

But the "Communion" service is intended to do more than remind us of this. It brings together, under the most sacred and affecting circumstances, the Christians who actually meet at the same table. It brings together in a very real sense all Christians the wide world over who are accustomed thus to obey and honour Christ. They cannot deny the family likeness. Various communities may adopt various ecclesiastical customs; some may so modify this sacred institution as to change it almost past

recognition; yet still it holds that so far as Christ's command is obeyed, there is a visible pledge for all countries and for all time, an assurance to the Church and a proof to the world, of the unity of Christians in Jesus Christ their Lord.

So it was intended by the Master. Unfortunately, as we all know, His design is far from being realised. The ignorance, the selfishness, the wilfulness of man has marred the vase which He would have shaped, both for use and beauty. The Lord's Table has not been a meeting-place for Christians, but often a very centre of strife and division. The phrase runs that this Church is not "in communion" with that, or that such a Church practises "strict communion," such another "open communion." Some who profess and call themselves Christians, with the Lord's own words upon their lips in one breath, will in the next anathematise others who use the same sacred words. It may be because while holding the same creed of a hundred clauses, Christians are found unable to agree upon the phraseology of one

clause, and that a mysterious one; it may be because the same kind of dispute has arisen which arose among the Twelve Apostles, and various sections have not been able to agree concerning the measure of ecclesiastical precedence which should be granted to each; it may be because they cannot agree whether an officer of a particular kind, with a particular name, performing particular functions, should or should not be appointed.

Pitiable, sometimes ludicrous, are some of these facts, but in any case, sadly true. To write down in plain terms the causes which sunder Christians and prevent them from meeting at the table of the Lord, would be to write a sad commentary upon one portion of the teaching which this institution was intended to convey. Yet it would be to fall into the same error for us to sit in judgment upon our neighbours. They are the schismatics who, without due scriptural cause, exclude others from that Table "where every humble, contrite heart is made a welcome guest." It remains for us to see to it that we neither make, nor

deepen, a "schism in the body." Love to our neighbours, charity towards all men, a readiness to meet fellow-Christians on the ground of that which is common to all, is a spirit which all can cultivate, all exhibit. Outward union is an effect, not a cause; it springs from and depends upon inward unity in Christ. The spirit which enables a man rightly to join in the Communion so far as Christ's relation to him and his relation to Christ is concerned, is the one secret for producing true communion with all who hold like precious faith in Him who is our common Head and Lord.

Communion as a Privilege and a Duty

FOR whom was the Lord's Supper designed? Who are included in the invitation to this table, what is the nature of the obligation resting upon any to attend, and under what conditions may they worthily draw near? These are the questions now to be answered, and though there can be little doubt as to the reply, it is certain that serious doubts are often felt by many, doubts which have given rise to trouble and anxiety, whilst others who have never been exercised upon the subject would be better Christians if they had intelligently considered and fairly answered these questions in reference to themselves.

The Passover was a family meal and a national festival. It was not a rite to be indiscriminately observed, it was for "the

redeemed of Jehovah" to celebrate their deliverance from bondage. When Jesus instituted the Supper, He was alone with the eleven disciples. It was to them that the commandment was given, and to all who afterwards should occupy their place and follow in their footsteps. From the beginning in apostolic times it was "the faithful" only who partook in "the breaking of bread." Evidently in Acts ii. those who "continued in the apostles' doctrine" continued also in this sacred fellowship, while in Acts xx. we are distinctly told that "the disciples" came together to break bread. St. Paul founds his argument against partaking of things sacrificed to idols upon the fact that they who eat the sacrifices have "communion with the altar," and no man can consistently partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons.¹ The term communion, he says, is not used in vain, the religious ordinance implies religious fellowship. The Lord of the Table is jealous with a pure and holy jealousy over those

¹ 1 Cor. x. 18-22.

who sit down with Him as His guests; it is impossible—a moral and spiritual unseemliness, implying utter incompatibility—that a man should, in the remotest sense, “have communion with” evil spirits, if he claim a place at the banquet of the Son of God. “What concord hath Christ with Belial?”

The principle is obvious when we think of the meaning of the Supper. To join in it implies an acceptance of Christ such as is true only of disciples. All are invited to listen to the gospel message. The invitation to the Royal Supper in the parable is to men and women from the highways and hedges, who have no suitable apparel to come in; they are to be urged with kindly pressure to come, one and all, whoever they may be, for “yet there is room,” and a wedding garment is provided by the bountiful King who gives the feast. The banquet of gospel blessing is to “every one that thirsteth,” offered freely, without money and without price. But the Lord’s Supper cannot be thus thrown open indiscriminately.

It implies an acceptance, which, alas ! not all are prepared to give. The eating of His body and drinking of His blood is a spiritual act, implying personal appropriation by faith of Christ's gift of the bread of life, and for a man to partake of the outward elements which symbolise this without any corresponding inward act of the soul would be a desecration and a sin.

So far all Christian Churches and the world outside are substantially agreed. It is true that the different views held concerning the sacrament of baptism and the meaning of regeneration have caused a difference of opinion between Catholic and Protestant Churches concerning the qualifications of communicants, but in principle the difference is less than it may appear. It may be hard to define what constitutes a true disciple of Christ, but all are agreed that the Lord's Table is for such, and such only.

The difficulty that arises here partly concerns the Church, whose duty it is to guard the table and prevent improper persons from

drawing near ; it also concerns the individual, who conscientiously asks himself, Am I so truly a Christian that I may venture to come? With the former difficulty we are not at present concerned. It is a matter of church discipline, and the history of Christendom shows how difficult it has been found to avoid excessive strictness on the one hand and undue laxity on the other. Sometimes the Lord's Table has been so severely "fenced" as to shut out timid souls from Communion altogether, and diminish the spiritual profit of those who have seemed to approach with fear and trembling the presence of a jealous Master rather than the table of a loving Friend and Lord. Sometimes, on the other hand, the most sacred rite of Christian worship has been allowed to degenerate into a hollow form, thrown open to persons who were Christian neither in creed nor in practice, but who were content thus to signify their allegiance to a dominant Church, and their conformity to a religion without the profession of which they could not hold civil office.

Men cannot read one another's hearts, and till the time when wheat and tares are separated by an unerring hand there will be danger in the Church's attempt to distinguish between those who truly belong to Christ and those who are His only in name. Yet the attempt must be made, and in all faithful Churches is made, with more or less success, so far as the prevention of outward scandal is concerned.

The difficulty with which we are called here to deal is that of the individual conscience. The danger here again is twofold. A conscience may be so tender as to be over-scrupulous, it may be so easy as to be practically useless. The Church will probably not bar the approach of an outwardly upright person who desires to testify allegiance to Christ; the burden rests upon the communicant himself—"let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup." But how is such "proving" to be carried out? The details of the answer that should be given whenever the act of communion is made are deferred

to the next chapter. At present we seek under the guidance of Scripture to help those who are asking in a more general way what constitutes Christian discipleship and qualification to make the profession and enjoy the privileges implied in attending the Lord's Supper.

Briefly, it may be said, the essentials are Repentance, Faith, and a Readiness to obey Christ's commands as a test of the reality of our contrition and our trust. All have sinned; if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Consequently, no one can suitably draw near to the Lord's Table who does not sincerely sorrow over the sins which have separated him from God and helped to crucify his Saviour, and while grieving over them, desire honestly and heartily to forsake them. And, inasmuch as the very act of partaking of the Supper implies the acceptance of Christ as a Saviour, no one can suitably draw near who is not prepared to receive, acknowledge, and rest upon Him for salvation, in accordance with His own words, that His blood was

shed on behalf of many, to the end that they might enjoy remission of their sins. And further, inasmuch as an examination of one's inward feelings is often precarious and may be deceptive, it is well to test the sincerity and completeness of our repentance and faith by our determination wholly to yield ourselves to Christ in humble obedience to His commandments, our preparedness, as He may direct us, to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him.

More than this Christ does not require; less than this no Christian would seek to offer. But what has been said does not necessarily imply that "full assurance of faith" which many Christians possess and which all should seek to make their own. The Lord's Table is not reserved for "them that are perfect,"¹ that is, full-grown Christians who have conquered doubt and mastered fear and left all timidity and hesitation behind them. The Good Physician did not come to heal those who were already whole,

¹ See 1 Cor. ii. 6, and compare the rendering in R.V. margin.

and He still reserves His tenderest words for those who fain would be His, but are conscious of unworthiness. There can be no better state of mind for an intending communicant than is implied in the longing to be Christ's combined with the humility which hardly dares to claim a place among His people. The young, the ignorant, the timid, the weak in faith, the self-mistrustful, are all encouraged to come to His table by the Saviour who healed the woman as she stole through the crowd to touch if it were but the hem of His garment. Bunyan's Mr. Fearing has an honourable place at the banquet of this gracious King; so has Mr. Feeble-Mind and Mr. Ready-to-Halt, and even Little-Faith is neither despised nor sent empty away. Clearness of apprehension, strength of resolution, an unclouded assurance, a triumphant confidence, are excellent features in a Christian character, and are on all grounds very earnestly to be desired and sought after. But they do not constitute conditions of acceptance at the table of the Lord, else very many would be shut out, and

in many cases those who most need what the sacred feast is intended to supply. The Christian festival of remembrance fulfils many high ends, and amongst the highest is the help it affords to sincere but trembling faith.

Sincerity, however—what the New Testament calls “simplicity”—must not be lacking. Of the presence of this essential condition none can judge but the Lord and the communicant himself. But each may judge for himself very easily. No long process of inquiry is necessary for a man to be able in this sense to answer to himself the question, “Am I the Lord’s, or am I not?” He may question whether his penitence is as deep and as poignant as it ought to be, whether his faith is as living and strong as it ought to be, whether his purpose is as earnest and thorough as it ought to be; he cannot long question whether he does sincerely desire to be the Lord’s in repentance and simple trust, issuing in obedience. And if such is his sincere desire and purpose, let him come with confidence, asking that what is lacking in him may be remedied by the Host who

not only provides the feast, but generously clothes the guests.

All, however, are not found amongst the number of those who would fain partake of Christ's provision, but doubt their own fitness. Some claim to be Christ's followers, but exhibit little or no desire to gather with His people at His table. Charity would hardly allow us to admit the claim of such persons to be Christians at all, were it not that this neglect often springs from ignorance or misunderstanding. That any one who really loves Christ should be habitually lax in obeying a commandment at once so simple and so gracious as "Do this in remembrance of Me," can only be possible on the supposition that he has not heard or has not rightly understood the words. It is, however, unfortunately a fact that many professing Christians—quite apart from those who, like the Friends, hold special views on the subject of the Sacraments—habitually slight this sacred ordinance. It becomes, therefore, necessary to point out that obedience to it, on the part of every one

who claims the Christian name, is an imperative duty, as well as an inestimable privilege. The Israelite was not only permitted, he was expected, he was commanded, to celebrate the Passover. True, there is in Christianity no command so explicit and repeated as those which gave directions for the due observance of Jewish ritual. The nature of the case is different. In a spiritual religion the obligation is spiritual, and a plain expression of the Lord's will should be sufficient. Christ does not tell us how we are to fulfil His commandment, nor when, nor how often ; He contents Himself with the simple "Do this." But the truly spiritual man finds in this single direction a bond stronger than triple brass or adamant. That Christ desires it is enough, and in endeavouring to do the Master's will he does not ask how little obedience will suffice, but how much he is permitted to render. His conscience will be exercised as to whether he has fully realised the privilege of being allowed to do anything to perpetuate the remembrance of Christ's dying love, rather than whether he can

legitimately be required to do more than he is doing towards such an end.

The duty is seen in the following considerations. (1) Christ commands it, and were His command ever so strange and incomprehensible, His word is enough. Sometimes we are called to follow Him in the dark, but yet His faithful ones do follow, and His presence makes their light. (2) In this case, however, the command can easily be understood to be one which is needful for the perpetuation of His name and work. Shall we hesitate to take our small part in so sacred a task? (3) The fulfilment of the command forms part of a Christian profession, and he who hesitates about confessing Christ before men will not be confessed by Christ before His Father and the holy angels. (4) The fulfilment of the command is needful for ourselves as well as others. This is the sacrament or outward symbol of living union with Christ, and by means of it our union with Him by faith is to be maintained and deepened. It argues presumption as well as ingratitude for any

man to slight that which Christ has appointed for His own honour and His Church's welfare.

Such an exposition may well appear to many to be superfluous. To urge as a duty that which should be eagerly claimed as a sacred privilege may appear worse than useless. But the excessive regard paid by some branches of the Christian Church to the sacraments has led others to a well-intended but none the less mischievous underestimate of their use and value. That some pay too much regard to the external act is no reason why others should make light of that to which the Lord Himself gives so deep a spiritual meaning. If it be said that the same grace may be obtained by the use of other means—a prayer-meeting, for example—the reply is obvious, This ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. It is true that the same kind of grace may be obtained in prayer at any time, but hardly true that the same degree of grace, as regards union with Christ by faith, can be obtained if we neglect His own appointed help to faith and devout memory. If the natural

appetite be keen, there is no need to urge the duty of eating. Yet it is a duty to maintain life by appointed means, even when we may not feel the need of one particular kind of food. Christ who knows man well says DO THIS; and those who fulfil the duty regularly and devoutly will wonder how it was ever possible that they failed to recognise in it an unspeakable and inestimable privilege.

Perhaps, however, those who hold back from the Lord's Table hold back through a fear which is born of ignorance. The ground is so holy, they dare not tread it; the sanctuary so awful, they hesitate to enter it. They remember the terrible words, "Whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." It is even written, though the words are not correctly so translated, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself."¹ The word rendered "damnation"

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 27, 29. The Revised Version should be consulted throughout in studying this passage.

should be rendered "judgment," and interpreted by the following clause, "if he discern not the body." The unworthy participation so sternly condemned by St. Paul was the sin of those who ate and drank as at a common meal, without perceiving the spiritual realities symbolised by the outward act. These men gathered to eat "their own supper," not the Lord's. They did not "discriminate"—so the word rendered "discern" often means—between the common and the sacred food. That which was given to them for a high and holy purpose they turned to base and common uses. Hence they were "guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." Like swine, they trampled pearls under their feet; they thus, according to the terrible expression of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "trod under foot the Son of God," and "counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith they were sanctified, a common thing," thus "doing despite unto the Spirit of grace."¹ Yet inasmuch as this profaneness did not spring from wilfulness

¹ Heb. x. 29. See R. V. margin.

and impiety, but from thoughtlessness and coarseness of feeling, the "judgment" with which the Corinthians were visited was not of the most severe kind. Damnation, in the sense of eternal ruin, is not hinted at. The judgment is described in the words that follow. Physical weakness, sickness, and in some instances death amongst members of the Church marked the Divine displeasure, and the body was punished that the soul might be saved alive. And St. Paul adds that if Christians would but examine and prove themselves, they might avoid the severe but necessary visitation of God.

A right understanding of this passage will, however, remove the tremors which a misinterpretation of it has raised in many minds. We can hardly regard the Lord's Table with too much sacred awe; we may easily view it with too much servile fear. It is a table of rejoicing. Every contrite sinner who strives to exercise true faith in Christ as his Saviour is made welcome to it by the Master, and should be welcomed by the Church. The timid, who would fain

approach but dare not, are the last persons to be represented by the self-indulgent and profane Corinthians, who treated the sacred feast with an almost incredible levity, and sat down to it almost as to a meal in their own houses. The hearts of the humble and contrite are the chosen dwelling-place of the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity. It was the publican who dared not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but prayed, God be merciful to me a sinner, who went down to his house forgiven and happy. The King's banqueting-house is opened with richest grace to those who are most ready to acknowledge that they do not deserve a place among His hired servants.

In Christianity, duty and privilege are constantly associated together. They belong together, are but different sides of the same shield. But in the religion of Christ privilege has the pre-eminence. It comes first in order of time, in order of thought, in order of importance. The gospel is a message of grace to sinners, a promise of wealth to beggars, of dignity to slaves. It begins by

giving, giving freely, giving abundantly. Duty only follows in its wake. It is that which is due from a man for whom Christ died. Christian duty, however, is not a matter of slight or slender obligation, because it is based upon grace, not upon law. The obligation should be felt to be the more mighty, far-reaching, and persistent, because its cords are those of love. Communion with the Lord Jesus Christ and with His people at His table is, first of all, a privilege. It is a privilege in itself, in what it symbolises, in what it imparts, and in what it promises. When such a privilege is offered, it becomes a duty to accept it, and Christians who do not avail themselves of such a privilege incur the sternest of all condemnations, that they are presuming upon grace and deficient in love. That is a charge which no follower of Christ can bear to incur, but the only alternative to it, in the case of one who neglects the Lord's Supper, is one of misplaced humility. It is not true humility which, Peter-like, refuses the Lord's condescending grace on the ground of conscious unworthiness. When

Peter said, "Lord, thou shalt never wash my feet," the answer was uncompromising, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." The penitent and trustful sinner is bidden to sit down with the Master to the feast which celebrates the redemption of sinners. It is pride, not humility, which is so much wiser than Christ as to say, I am not worthy to come. Rather, let us draw near with true hearts in full assurance of faith, and find access even into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by the way which He has dedicated for us, through the veil—that is to say, His flesh.

Our hearts we open wide,
To make the Saviour room :
And lo ! the Lamb, the Crucified,
The Sinner's Friend, is come !

His presence makes the feast ;
And now our spirits feel
The glory not to be exprest,
The joy unspeakable.

VI

Before Communion

ONE clear direction is given in Scripture to all who seek to prepare themselves for attendance at the Lord's table—"Let a man examine himself" ("prove himself," R.V.), "and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor. xi. 28). In ver. 31 the Corinthians are told that if they would "discern themselves," or discriminate wisely as to their own character and state of mind, they would not incur the righteous judgment of God which will rest upon all who partake of the Supper unworthily. The word translated "prove" means both to prove and to approve. We can only be approved by being first well proven. This a man may do for himself in the sight of God, if he will faithfully view his heart and life in the searching light of that sacred Presence and

seek for the preparation of soul which God alone can bestow. Elsewhere St. Paul bids these same Corinthians "try themselves whether they be in the faith, prove your own selves,"¹ just as he tells the Galatians that every man must "prove his own work" and bear his own burden. What special kind of trial or proving is necessary for one who would be a guest at the Lord's Table?

The habit of self-examination has come to be discredited among many good people. The process of self-analysis is spoken of as unhealthy and unedifying, as turning one's attention too much upon oneself, and fostering a morbid kind of religion. The exercise has its dangers. Practised in excess it may produce these and other evils. Self-questioning even in moderation needs to be wisely done, or it may depress and exhaust the soul which needs to be braced and strengthened. Questions should never be proposed alone. They should be associated with reading, meditation, and above all, with

¹ 2 Cor. xiii. 5 ; Gal. vi. 4, 5.

prayer. The reading of a portion of Scripture, carefully pondered over in the reading, may well be followed by self-questioning as to our own experience and spiritual state, and this should immediately be followed—perhaps rather accompanied—by earnest prayer for the help necessary to bear real self-knowledge and to remedy the deficiencies and errors which self-examination will bring to light. The word of God is food, self-examination is medicine. Or the word itself may be so used that it shall pierce to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and prove itself a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Then prayer will bind and heal the needful wounds made by this sword of the Spirit, and the process of self-examination, instead of weakening and depressing, will send us forth strong in the Lord and the power of His might.

The inward searching which especially belongs to preparation for the Communion may be differently presented. In the forefront of the service itself we find the Ten

Commandments—a reminder of the purity of heart and life which communicants should seek to make their own. These may be carefully read over, with one or two questions appended to each, closing with a prayer for Divine grace to strengthen us where we have found our obedience to be defective. These questions should be framed in the light of our Lord's spiritual exposition of the precepts of the Decalogue. Under the third commandment, for example, it is needful to ask, Have I in all things shown becoming reverence to God's name, His word, His honour, or allowed myself in levity of speech or of spirit where sacred things are concerned? The sixth commandment forbids envy, jealousy, and hatred, as well as violence; uncharitableness of thought and speech, as well as unkind or malicious actions. The eighth commandment may be made an occasion for an examination into all that concerns our worldly circumstances and dealings with others, the justice and honesty of our conduct of business, our ways of getting and of using money, and all

that comes under the injunction, "Take thought for things honourable in the sight of all men." The reading of the ninth commandment will furnish an opportunity for an inquiry into our own truthfulness in the largest sense of the word, the reality and sincerity of our character, as well as our carefulness to speak the truth with our lips. Slander may be hinted as well as spoken, and is often much more effectual in its mischief when no "false witness" is borne by the tongue.

Our Lord, however, summed up the whole law and the prophets in two great commandments. These may be made the basis of self-proving of a very searching kind. The first commandment probes us to the depths: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength." Heart, wherein hast thou failed in this? Mind, wherein hast thou failed? Soul, wherein hast thou been found wanting? Strength, wherein hast thou been scanty and deficient? Love to God may be tested by our love for

His word, His worship, our delight in thinking of Him, in praying to Him, the promptness, the earnestness, the steadfastness of our obedience to His commandments. The command to love our neighbour as ourselves suggests that we have a duty to ourselves, which is not to be forgotten between our duty to God on the one hand and our duty to our neighbour on the other. Such attention to ourselves as comes under the head of duty will not take the form of selfishness, more probably it will involve self-denial. But it is well sometimes to remember that each of us is of value in God's sight, and that, if only as part of our duty to Him and to others, we must make the best of that which He has entrusted to us. There is a godly, as well as a manly self-respect. It is consistent with the utmost humility, but it bids every child of God honour God's work in his own heart, and walk worthy of the high calling to which in Christ he is called. But love to God and legitimate self-love are both effectively tested by our love to our neighbour. He that loveth not

his brother does not love God. He probably does love himself, but not in a Christian or commendable sense. He who truly loves the Father may easily prove the strength of his affection by its power to enable him to love the brethren, kindly to regard them, sincerely to sympathise with them, efficiently to help them—in spite of all that is unlovely and unattractive—so far as power and opportunity serve.

It may perhaps be thought that all this has little to do with the Lord's Supper. It must be remembered, however, that it has very much to do with the Christian character, and the Christian as he comes to the Lord's Table must inquire particularly as to all that concerns his position and conduct as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Drawing nearer to our immediate subject, we are reminded that the invitation to the Lord's Table in the Communion Office is given to those who "truly and earnestly repent of their sins," have "a lively and steadfast faith in Christ their Saviour," and a "thankful remembrance of His death," those who are

“in love and charity with their neighbours,” and “intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in His holy ways.” These clauses may appropriately be used for self-examination, and if plied in the light of Scripture teaching will be found very helpful in the work of self-proving. It is hardly needful to illustrate the way in which they should be used. If we have to reproach ourselves for the poverty and imperfectness of our repentance, some minutes spent in recalling our sins and bringing them into the light alike of God's truth and of Christ's love will help materially to prepare us for Communion. Sins of omission should be considered as well as sins of commission; those “besetting sins” into which we are most frequently and sadly betrayed; the aggravations attending many of our offences because of the light and knowledge we possess and the many warnings we have received; and especially the terrible aggravation which attends all wandering of heart and

life on the part of those who have seen the unspeakable love of God in Christ to sinners, yet from that very sight have turned away only to slip and stumble and fall into transgression again. The pain which all sin causes to a loving Father, its heinousness as crucifying the Saviour and spilling again His precious blood, its heartless wickedness as grieving the Holy Spirit of God, are thoughts which will wound, in order to restore, a truly tender conscience.

Self-examination as to the reality, the liveliness and steadfastness of our faith in Christ, and our thankful remembrance of His death for us, forms the central portion of preparation for the Communion. The reality of our faith is tested by our asking ourselves whether we are relying for salvation on anything but Christ and His sacrifice on our behalf. Unconsciously we may have been thinking of our position, character, or reputation, our obedience, our Christian virtues, or even upon our faith itself, as if our hope of acceptance lay in some of

these. Continually the soul has need to say afresh—

Whate'er in me seems wise, or good,
Or strong, I here disclaim :
I wash my garments in the blood
Of the atoning Lamb.

But never more than when drawing near to the table of the Lord. A meditation upon the fulness of God's provision in Christ for the sins of the whole world will strengthen faith which may have grown weak, and purify faith which may have become alloyed or lost its simplicity. The words "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," suggest such meditation. "Behold": let one object fill the whole field of vision, and the soul gaze upon it with adoring wonder. "The Lamb of God": with the 12th chapter of Exodus, or the 53rd chapter of Isaiah in mind, we may gaze upon that spotless Sufferer whom it pleased the Lord to bruise and put to grief, that the chastisement of our peace might be upon Him, and that by His stripes we might be healed. "Which

taketh away": lifts up upon His own shoulders, carries, and is able to carry away, the sin of the whole world. Pause, my soul, and think of thine own sins; think of what it means to know a very little and bear a very little of the sin of others, its terrible weight, its ugly stains, its intolerable shame; and then lift thine eyes to Him who is able to bear and bear away the sin of the whole world! Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!

Self-examination as to our being in love and charity with all men may well be made minute and personal. The vague and general phrase, "love of our neighbour," may be translated by each into the concrete, and our hearts closely tried as to those who may have offended us or whom we have offended,—with the latter, strangely enough, it is harder to be at peace,—those who feel coldly to us or to whom we feel coldly, those who have misrepresented us or whom we have, wittingly or unwittingly, misrepresented. And when the task is over, let the stream of God's love to us in Christ shed abroad by

the Holy Spirit, the love which forgives us our ten-thousand-talent debt, flood our hearts with its gracious tide, and flow forth towards our hundred-pence-debtors and all with whom we are brought into relation, and then it will not be hard to say, as we draw near to the Master's Table, that we are in love and charity with all men.

A portion of our regard in these moments of self-proving may well go out to the future. There is much to mourn over in the past; but what of the time that is to come? How the devout heart leaps forth at the word, eager for new and better service, longing for an opportunity to prove its devotion and be numbered amongst those who "intend to lead a new life"! But it will not suffice to propose a general obedience to all the commandments of God. One who truly desires to prove himself will carefully mark those parts of the Commandments where obedience is hardest, and ask himself, Do I intend to lead a new life in this particular, as regards that special duty, in avoiding this other kind of temptation, the points in which I have

thus far most frequently failed? Not, Do I *wish* to lead a new life? but, Do I *intend* to do it, is my mind made up, that so far as in me lies, God being my helper, I *will*? "Walking from henceforth in His holy ways," not allowing myself in any known sin, using all the means He has provided for destroying the power of the old corrupt nature within me, denying myself, taking up my cross daily, that I may truly follow Him, at whose table I hope shortly to appear?

The main object, however, before the mind's eye in preparation for the act of Communion must be the sacrifice and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thoughts of ourselves come in as we think of our sins which "pierced and nailed Him to the tree," of our faith in Him, its strength and its weakness, and the fulness of the surrender which we should be prepared to make of ourselves to Him. But He Himself should fill our field of view. Christ the all-sufficient Saviour from sin, Christ the all-atoning Sacrifice for sin, Christ the all-prevalent High Priest ever presenting to the Father the one Atonement

for the sins of the people—these are the thoughts with which mind and heart should be filled ere we join in the solemn Commemoration Festival. Reverently we may recall the details of His sufferings and death as recorded in the Gospels, that we may remember how costly is the price of our redemption.¹ But it is not the record of past suffering that should chiefly move us, however tender and sacred be every line which tells us what the Saviour bore for us. It is the power of the eternal sacrifice, offered by the Eternal Priest, of the "Eternal Victim," of which the Lord's Supper speaks with silent impressiveness.

Thy offering still continues new;
Thy vesture keeps its bloody hue.

It is the Priest who is made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life, who offers a living Sacrifice, the offering of a life that has passed through and triumphed over death, He it is in whom we rejoice, on whom our

¹ Read portions of Matt. xxvi., xxvii. ; Mark xiv., xv. ; Luke xxii., xxiii. ; John xiii., xviii., xix.

eyes of faith are fixed, as we kneel to receive the tokens of His dying love. The thought of such a Saviour, then, should be carefully impressed upon the mind in preparation, by the reading of such passages in the Epistles, especially Heb. vii.—x., which enable us rightly to “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.”

This is perhaps the best place to lay stress upon a thought which has hardly received the attention it deserves in the devout consideration which the Christian Church has bestowed upon the subject of the Lord’s Supper, viz. the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to it. In the Communion Office, the very words of which are hallowed by long and reverent usage, there is but slight recognition of the Holy Spirit; His name occurs but once or twice. In the service of the Scottish Episcopal Church and in some other liturgies a prayer occurs in which the Holy Spirit is invoked to bless and consecrate the elements. But it is not of such prayer that we speak. The whole Christian Church would have been the gainer if throughout its history the

spiritual character of the Communion service had been more fully preserved by a more direct recognition of the Holy Spirit. This would in no wise interfere with the sinner's devout contemplation of his Saviour. It forms indeed the only true means for its realisation. Not by fixing the eye upon consecrated bread and wine and the supposed mystical presence of Christ *in* the elements, not even by fixing the attention upon the broken body and shed blood which the elements symbolise, do we best draw near to Christ and He to us. It is the work of the Spirit to "glorify" Him; He it is who "shall take of Mine and shall show it unto you." As the Father is seen and known in the Son, so the Son is seen and known by the Spirit. We honour Christ most and understand Him best, when we are most truly filled with His Spirit. It is possible to "deem the cross can, spell-like, save," and fail to enjoy its full power, because we do not sufficiently recognise the work of the Spirit who alone can make us understand its meaning and submit ourselves to its sway. It is for

the Everlasting Spirit to be the "true Recorder of His passion," the "Witness of His dying," the "Remembrancer Divine." The mention of the Spirit's name is the most effectual antidote to that unintentionally "carnal" way of regarding the Eucharist which has lowered and still lowers the spiritual character of what is known as "High" doctrine on this subject in the Church of Christ.

In preparation for Communion, therefore, let us seek not only for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, but also the communion of the Holy Spirit. Remember that it is His work :

1. To enlighten our minds so that the truth as it is in Jesus may be intelligently apprehended. The mystery of the Atonement is stupendous, and the mere natural exercise of the mind will not enable us to enter into its meaning. Pray for the Spirit who "shall declare it" unto you.

2. To quicken our own sluggish spirits that we may be prompt and responsive when spiritual truth is presented to us. Christ may be "evidently set forth" before our

eyes in the Lord's Supper as if "crucified among" us, yet we fail to perceive Him, unless the Spirit enable us. To the Spirit the words are addressed—

In vain He died, and rose on high,
And stoops beseeching from His throne;
Till Thou this alien heart prepare,
And gain for Christ an entrance there.

3. To "apply" the cleansing blood, and witness to our conscience of its part therein. For the individual, the important moment is that of the *application* of gospel blessing. For the race, the work of Christ is done. The redeeming force at work in the world is sufficient for the salvation of all. But it avails only where it is applied. Faith is the necessary condition in the individual heart, but faith cannot do the work. The Agent is the Holy Spirit. The cleansing moment for me is that in which He "applies" the purifying blood to my stained and guilty conscience. The life-giving moment for me is that in which He causes me to die with Christ unto sin and rise in newness of life. The blessed central moment of the Lord's

Supper is that in which the power of the Spirit of Christ most fully applies its spiritual efficacy to the inmost soul of the communicant. It is in and through the Spirit alone that the "Real Presence" of the Master is felt, understood, and enjoyed.

VII

During Communion

WE draw near to the table of the Lord. Christ is present, as in all His ordinances, to meet such as are prepared to receive Him; and especially present in this ordinance to minister spiritual food and life, made ours through His atoning death. But only the faithful can truly eat and drink at this table; seek we therefore most earnestly the frame of mind which will make every part of the Communion service a "feast with Jesu's priests and kings," a "sitting together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

From the earliest times certain features have characterised this service in the Christian Church. All branches and sections of the Church, from the Roman Catholic at mass to the Highlander sitting by the plain

table on the open hillside, use as the central feature of the service our Lord's own words of institution, the charter of direction and the promise of blessing for His followers in all time. Varying names and doctrines, and various order and ceremonial, do not prevent all who really trust in this Saviour from meeting in His name, as it were around a common centre, in the words which record His dying love and convey His parting message. Christ said, "This do in remembrance of Me." Each should therefore pray, Help me, Lord, in company with all Thy faithful ones, to keep Thee in view from first to last, my Lord, my Saviour, and my All! But from the beginning also, thanksgiving has been the ruling note of the service, whilst prayer, triumphal hymn, and other acts of united worship have never been absent. Some of the words still in use in a large number of Reformed Churches, the *Gloria in Excelsis*—"Glory to God in the highest. . . . O Lamb of God that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us"—have been used in all languages

and amongst all nations from times very nearly succeeding those of the apostles. If we use the very words, they may well have a special sacredness from their associations of nearly two thousand years; if we do not formally use them, the thanksgivings and petitions of the devout heart will almost inevitably be framed after their pattern. Lord, teach us how to pray, and how to give thanks!

At the door of the Holy Place we seek for true preparation of heart. We draw off the shoes and make bare the head, not literally, but as before Him who seeth in secret. The opening prayer of such a service may well be, "O Thou to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that I may perfectly love Thee and worthily magnify Thy holy name." The repetition of the Commandments or the recollection of them, especially in their searching meaning as expounded by Christ Himself, reminds us

of our need of this opening prayer for purity. Think of the heart lying open to the gaze of others, and the shame that would overtake us could its real state be seen by our fellow-men; think of the unworthy and selfish desires which never find expression in clearly framed thoughts, still less in words or acts; think of the "secrets" which we would fain hide from our own souls, hardly able to bear the sight of ourselves as we really are; and how fervently will the prayer, "Cleanse the thoughts of my heart," go up before the throne of grace! That such a one as I am should perfectly love God, worthily magnify His name, how is that conceivable? One there is who has access to the inmost chambers of the soul: One who has never ceased to draw and strive and lead upwards our wayward, wandering hearts; God *in* us, as well as God *over* us and God *for* us, the Holy Spirit Himself.

Refining Fire, go through my heart,
Illuminate my soul;
Scatter Thy life through every part,
And sanctify the whole.

The time during which the offertory is being taken for the poor need not and should not be lost for devotion through distraction of mind. The sentences from Scripture which are read remind us that true almsgiving is an act of religion, and what is given will be acceptable, or not acceptable, to Christ according to the spirit in which it is offered. Here we give especially to the poor of the Church, Christ's own "little ones," who are hungry or thirsty, sick or strangers, and to whom according to our measure we may minister. If we give, not from habit or because it is expected, or grudgingly, but with Christian sympathy and readiness, a time will come when He who has redeemed us, sitting upon His throne, will say, "Ye did it unto Me."

Whilst the invitation to the table is being given by the minister, let us lose sight of the messenger in the vision of Him who sends him. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Host at this table, it is He who bids us draw near. He who in the days of His flesh did not disdain to eat and drink with publicans

and sinners, who rebuked the outwardly righteous Pharisee for his cold reception, and spoke peace to the heart of the poor sinful woman who knelt broken-hearted at His feet. He who threw open the wedding-feast of His kingdom to all who would come, from the highways and hedges, but who expected each to be clothed in the wedding-garment Himself was ready to provide. Let each say, Lord, clothe me in raiment white and clean! and listen, as the words of invitation describe this fine linen in which the King's guests should appear before Him—"ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins and are in love and charity with your neighbours—draw near with faith . . . and make your humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon your knees." No attitude of body and soul so welcome at this moment. Our place is in the dust. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. The remembrance of sin is always wholesome, however "grievous," if it lead to a more complete purging of every morsel of its evil

leaven away. The remembrance of sin's burden is unhallowed and unblessed, if it help to depress us and sink us in the mire. Here the burden is regarded but for a moment or two, and at the foot of the cross. It cannot long bear that sight. The load is loosened while we gaze. The hard frost of the heart melts, yields, vanishes, in the eye of the Sun of Righteousness. "Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father, for Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake!" No unforgiven sin can withstand the might of that prayer, offered in faith; say rather, the might of the Atonement which that prayer makes our own.

If we are in any doubt upon the matter, let us open our inward ear to hear the "comfortable words" which surely no unbelief can resist. The whole sacrament is for our "comfort," and here the sore and sad heart is most in need of that combined soothing and strengthening which the words of Christ and His apostles can give. Two words from the Master, one from His faithful servant Paul,

one from His loving servant John, and each a word of power and grace. "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth." If Jesus Himself said in our ears, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest," should we not come? I come, Lord, once more, "just as I am," for Thou didst come into the world to save sinners, of whom surely I am chief! Lord, speak Thine own peace to my heart, to my great and endless comfort!

After prayer, thanksgiving. *Sursum corda*: lift up your hearts! is the word of exhortation. Whither else should souls relieved from heavy clog and burden fly? I would lift mine upwards with all earnest aspiration, but, Lord, lift thou me. It is "meet, right, and our bounden duty at all times to give thanks," now most of all to praise the Giver of the unspeakable gift; but the soul must stir itself up to praise; the company of the faithful must stir one another up, and the Spirit of God must quicken and lift from the earth the souls that cleave to the dust, that they may join with angels, archangels, and all the com-

pany of heaven in acceptable worship of thanksgiving. Think of the worship of the skies. Think of those "who have departed this life in His faith and fear," and who are now praising Him for complete deliverance. Think of the mercies of the past, of the opportunities of the present, of the promises and hopes of the future, and say, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed,"—even my heart so prone to wander, which Thou hast redeemed and stablished by grace,—"I will sing and give praise."

We kneel in lowly rapture. The silence is broken by the "prayer of humble access," telling of the spirit in which we approach the table. Not trusting in our own righteousness, O Lord, Thou knowest. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Thy table, but Thou dost give us the best of a royal, a heavenly feast. Thyself, O Lord, Thou hast promised; even Thou canst give no more, and we are humbly bold to ask no less. Oh that we might so eat and drink as that our sinful bodies and souls

might be washed and kept clean through the virtue of Thy body and blood given and poured out for us!

The prayer which follows is called the prayer of consecration—that is to say, the setting apart for a sacred purpose. Bread and wine are on the table before the prayer ; bread and wine are still there when the prayer is finished. But the good gifts of God, prepared from corn of wheat and juice of grape, for which in themselves we should always give thanks, have acquired a sacred meaning when they have been set apart for this high and sacred end. They are “common” no longer. They speak to us now as signs charged with a deep significance which Christ Himself has given them. This is My body ; this is My blood. The elements of earth are steps on a higher than Jacob’s ladder, leading us heavenwards, strengthening faith to enter even into the holiest through the blood of Jesus. As we gaze upon that which is still bread, we “discern” in it the Lord’s body ; as we hear

the wine being poured from vessel to vessel, we see Him who came not with water only, but with water and blood, yielding Himself to death, that we might live for ever. We see Him who is now our living Lord, wearing the scars which tell of His work of eternal redemption for us ; see Him not afar off, but near, in our very midst, and to the eye of faith His Real Presence of glory fills the whole field of vision :—

Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face :
Here would I touch and handle things unseen :
Here grasp with firmer hand the eternal grace,
And all my weariness upon Thee lean.

Here would I feed upon the bread of God ;
Here drink with Thee the royal wine of heaven ;
Here would I lay aside each earthly load ;
Here taste afresh the calm of sin forgiven.

The moments of waiting before communicating may well be used in short petitions. There is not time for sustained prayer, and the soul is most helped now by brief but earnest supplication. Lord, help me to draw near aright. Lord, teach me how to feed on Thee in my heart by faith with thanksgiving.

Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief. Lord, I repent, help Thou mine impenitence. Lord, I thank Thee, help Thou my unthankfulness. Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee, help Thou my lack of love. Make me to desire the bread of life, the wine of heaven, the gift of God to perishing sinners in all its fulness. Receive me, O most gracious Father, unworthy as I am, for the sake of Thine own dear Son, through His sacrifice, which thus I commemorate, in which I rest, and which I would ever plead as the ground of all my hope. Appear to me, blessed Saviour, as Thou didst to Thy disciples at Emmaus in the breaking of bread, and abide with me for evermore. Take, O Most Holy Spirit of truth and grace, of the things of Christ and show unto me, that I may, by partaking of this bread and wine, be made partaker of that spiritual food which liveth and abideth for ever. Lord, help me!

Respond inwardly to the prayers which the minister offers for you while giving the bread and the wine. He prays that body

and soul may be cleansed and kept unto everlasting life by the only power which can so cleanse and keep them. All is included in such a prayer as this. Strive to fulfil the exhortations given. Eat in remembrance. Feed by faith with thanksgiving. Drink, remembering that without shedding of blood is no remission, but that HIS blood has been shed for many for remission of sins. And be thankful. For His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood is drink indeed.

The close of the Communion service consists of a prayer, a triumphal hymn of blended praise and prayer, and the benediction. The prayer asks that God would receive our act of worship as a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and of ourselves as a whole burnt-offering, placed upon the altar of consecration. Unworthy as we are to offer any sacrifice, we believe that God will accept "this our bounden duty and service." For "whoso offereth praise glorifieth God," and we are bidden to present our bodies to Him a "holy, living, acceptable sacrifice, which is

our reasonable service." This is to seal and consummate the whole act of communion. God has set His seal upon the covenant in the gift of Christ; we set to it our seal by afresh giving Him ourselves. Afresh, however often we have done so before, for past faith and past consecration will not avail for a living sacrifice. Afresh, however our consciences may tell us that we have failed in our promises already made, for He knows our weakness, knows also our efforts, and He promises afresh to give us of His strength. Elijah went in the strength of a single meal for forty days and forty nights, and in many a feeble soul God has wrought a similar moral and spiritual miracle. If we have truly fed upon spiritual food in the Communion, we may be bold to go forth in its strength to toil, to danger, or to suffering, and at last to death, the last enemy, whom Christ has met and conquered.

The "Gloria" bids us echo the angels' song. The Church militant here on earth has its anthems, and this is one of the noblest.

Those who have been banqueting with the Lord of angels, the Lord of dead and living, the Head of the "one family who dwell in Him, one Church above, beneath," may well anticipate some of the triumphs of the skies. But this burst of thanksgiving, "we praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory," might seem to "wind our souls too high for sinful man below the sky," and the chorus of praise passes into the tender pleading of prayer. For us the fight is not yet over, the victory not yet won. "O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us." This is the sinner's first prayer and his last. We need mercy as we draw near, mercy as we offer our service, mercy as we leave our sacred worship for the life of duty and temptation. And upon all the pleading, longing hearts there falls, like rain upon the mown grass, the music of the benediction, the promise of the peace which Christ and Christ alone can give, and which none can take away.

For this cause we bow our knees unto Thee, O Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that Thou wouldst grant us, according to the riches of Thy glory, to be strengthened with power through Thy Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith; to the end that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled unto all the fulness of God.

VIII

After Communion

AFTER the meal, the journey ; after privilege, duty ; after resolve, performance. The contrast between the Transfiguration glories upon the top of Hermon and the conflict with evil spirits and human pain and unbelief below is only too common an experience. We have sat down under HIS shadow with great delight, His fruit was sweet to our taste, He brought us to the banqueting-house, His banner over us was love. It is good to be at His table, but it is not good, not possible, to stay there. The problem of life is to translate the spiritual experience of moments of insight into the language of the tasks which belong to hours of comparative gloom. "Too soon we rise, the symbols disappear." But though the feast is past, the love abides. And abiding

joy is found in duty fulfilled rather than privilege cherished. The saint who was blessed with a rapturous vision of Christ in his secret meditations did not hesitate, when summoned to unpleasant duty, promptly to leave his high communion for lowly service. On returning to his cell, the radiant vision still illuminated the room, and he was greeted with the words, "Because thou hast left Me, thou hast found Me; if thou hadst not left Me, thou hadst no longer found Me." We go to the Lord's house that everywhere we may discern His presence; we sit at the Lord's Table that everywhere we may enjoy His love and do His will.

There are two dangers attending the transition from an impressive religious service to actual life. Either the feeling of spiritual exaltation has been lofty, and then there is the danger of reaction; or the conscious enjoyment of blessing has been slight or far below expectation, and then come the dangers of disappointment. One lesson may be learned from both, not to depend too much upon feeling of any kind. Rapture in

religion is like happiness in ordinary life ; it comes most frequently, and is of the best and most strengthening kind, when it comes unsought. It is God's will that we should be blessed by our waiting on Him, it is by no means His will that we should be always raised to a high pitch of conscious enjoyment. We may seek this, as one of His good gifts, and be thankful for it when it comes ; we have no right to demand it, and should never be disappointed when it is withheld. "I will not let thee go, except Thou bless me," is a bold word, quite within the rights of the humbly trustful Christian to utter. But the Jacob who comes forth from Peniel as Israel, having seen God face to face, may come forth halting upon his thigh. God has many blessings in His storehouse ; rapturous exaltation is only one of them, and not always the best. If it is given, let us see that it stimulates and strengthens, not intoxicates the soul ; if it is withheld, let us soberly use the less exciting draught which will certainly refresh and help us, if we have sat at the Master's table indeed.

In any case, it may be ours to be "filled with the Spirit," to be assured that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. That is enough for service, and forms the best preparation for it.

If ye love Me, keep My commandments. The best test of the reality and strength of religious feeling is the promptness, fidelity, and completeness of our active service. It is often well to associate with our attendance at the Lord's Supper some *special* effort of our Christian life, either the overcoming of some particular temptation or weakness, or the performance of some difficult or irksome duty. The entirety of our devotion to Christ will not be marred by such concentration upon details. It is a feature of religious experience that the whole work is better done for the resolute effort to accomplish one particular part faithfully and well, especially if that part be one in which we especially need strengthening. The whole city becomes ours if the citadel is captured. And, as all our duties do not meet us at once, or all temptations assail us

at once, there is in all probability some particular sinful tendency to be mastered or some unwelcome piece of work to be undertaken, which for the moment forms the citadel of our spiritual enemy. The effort to master it rallies all our spiritual forces and braces them for whatever they may be called upon to accomplish. And as at each Communion we renew our allegiance to Christ and receive fresh strength from Him, it may prove to be good spiritual strategy to bring the influence of such a service to bear upon one portion, as it were, of our Christian character. The service is not, as some hold it to be, a sacrifice which may be made to avail for the delivery of souls from purgatory ; but it is a means of grace which may be exceedingly helpful in delivering our living selves from the bondage of sin and advancing us one stage in our progress Godwards and heavenwards. The specific mention in our prayers of a particular Christian grace, such as humility or purity or faith or courage, will give definiteness to the devout feelings raised in our hearts by attendance

at the Lord's Table, and prevent them from being dissipated and worse than lost. The direct mention in our prayers after Communion of some sin—hasty speech, uncharitable judgment, love of money, or self-indulgence in any form—may be found very helpful in our battles against it.

Neither passion nor pride
Thy cross can abide,
But melt in the fountain that streams from Thy side.

The power of the evil one may be loosened or broken altogether by this direct application to the conscience of the emancipating power of Christ's cross. It need hardly be said that no superstitious view with regard to the Communion service is hereby encouraged. Christ's grace and help may be had at any time, and should be sought at every time. But the sacred moments which we spend in specially commemorating His work for us may well be turned to good account, as we pass from them to active life, by a direct and immediate application of spiritual blessing to our immediate needs.

Quite apart, however, from any such strictly personal appropriation, let it be said generally, that all who join in the Communion service are by that very act, if it has been faithfully performed, pledged anew to Christian service and strengthened anew for its successful accomplishment. Christ's followers, His Church "militant here on earth," form a sacramental host. When the Roman soldier took the *sacramentum* or military oath, he held himself bound by one of the most sacred bonds he knew. There is no bond so sacred as that which is sealed with the precious blood of Christ. God has made this covenant which stands, sure and steadfast, to all who are willing to enter their names in the covenant-grant. Whilst it may be well, annually, at the first Communion of the year, to take a more complete review of our life, and more formally renew our promise to be the Lord's, we virtually do this every time we are guests at His table. He says to us once more, This is the new covenant in My blood which is poured out for many, for the remission

of sins. We say to Him again, as the people of Israel said to Moses, "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient." Having afresh taken our place under the banner, afresh put on the uniform, afresh fixed on the badge and renewed the oath of Christian soldiers, we bear fresh responsibilities which call for renewal of determination and strenuous effort.

But the chief influence of the service should not be exacting, as of new demands made upon us, which we are conscious of being unable adequately to meet. The sacrament has been taken "to our comfort." Feeding upon the dainties and bounties of Christ's provision is not exhausting work. If we have spiritually received His blessed body and blood, that is but another way of saying that Christ has graciously entered afresh into our hearts, and taken up His abode there more fully and completely. "If any man will hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me." We have been in

the presence of One who has the marvellous power of transfusing His own strength into His faithful ones. The main thought and feeling, therefore, by which we seek to link the Communion service with our active life should be one of renewed strength, increased capacity, as when an army that has been worn down in numbers and energy receives a splendid reinforcement. "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." The vital union between Christ and the Christian is the deep mystery of the Christian life, inexplicable in words, but delightfully intelligible and familiar in practice. I live; nay, not I, but Christ liveth in me. What task is too great for Him, if He condescend to live in me and work through me? If God be for us, who can be against us?

It is the problem of the Christian life to follow Christ in His great work of raising earth to heaven by bringing heaven to the rescue of earth. Christ did the work perfectly, in His Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, and Ascension, once for all.

It is for His followers in their measure to carry on His great enterprise. They are called to move, like Him, " 'twixt the Mount and multitude, doing or receiving good," that the glory which they see upon the Mount they may reflect as they move among the crowd. Those who sit at His table behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and it is theirs to be transformed into that image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord. So will the meaning of that "mystery" in which Christians commemorate the love of their Master and Lord be rendered into the only language the world can understand, that of pure, loving, helpful, devoted lives. Not once a year are we to feed upon Him, nor once a month, nor once a week, but daily, hourly, always. Our chief post-Communion prayer will therefore be that the grace which is especially symbolised by this pre-eminently Christian act of worship may be our portion continually, till the life of faith aided by symbols is lost in the rapture of a life of sight in the Master's presence — that "perfect presence of His

face, which we, for want of words, call Heaven."

*Bread of heaven! on Thee I feed,
For Thy flesh is meat indeed.*

*Ever may my soul be fed
With this true and living bread;
Day by day with strength supplied,
Through the life of Him who died.*

*Vine of heaven! Thy blood supplies
This blest cup of sacrifice;
'Tis Thy wounds my healing give;
To Thy cross I look and live.
Thou my life! oh, let me be
Rooted, grafted, built on Thee!*

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